RAMPAGE PRESENTS
REALMS OF FANTASY
www.rofmagazine.com
Curtis 02291
Keira Knightley IN King Arthur
7 New Fantasy Games Reviewed
8 New Fantasy Stories
TERRI WINDLING: In the Company of Wolves
PLUS: Fantasy Books, Art, and More!
August 2004
$3.99US $5.99CAN
08
0 09281 02291 6
RETAILER: DISPLAY UNTIL AUGUST 3

NEW - FROM THE

Gun

ガ

- Gun-blazing action from Yasuhiro Nightow, the creator of *TRIGUN*
- Based on the Gungrave game for the Playstation 2
- Soundtrack available day-and-date!

For Brandon Heat, death doesn't matter.

Driven by his need for revenge, he returns from beyond the grave to cripple Millennion, the huge mafia organization that uses undead monsters as its enforcers. His ultimate goal will be to destroy Harry MacDowel, the leader of Millennion and, at one time, Brandon's best friend...

Available July 6, 2004!

DVD $29.98*
DVD with Box $39.98*
CD $14.98*

Run Time: 100 Min.
Rating: 16 UP (strong violence and language, mature themes)
Genre: Action / Drama

*US Suggested Retail Price. Prices may vary in Canada.

geneon Pioneer

16 UP

© RED/PROJECT GUNGRAVE

CREATORS OF TRIGUN!

grave

グレイヴ

DVD Features:

- Surround Sound Audio:
  - English Dolby Digital 5.1
  - Japanese DTS 5.1
  - Japanese Dolby Digital 2.0
- Foil Enhanced Packaging!
- Also available with a collector's edition box featuring an original Yasuhiro Nightow illustration and containing a lenticular mousepad (while supplies last)!

Series Features:

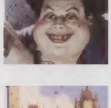
- Featuring animation by Madhouse (Trigun, Texhnolyze, Paranoia Agent, Tokyo Godfathers)
- Scripts by Yosuke Kuroda (Trigun, Tenchi Muyo), Excel Saga, Mao-chan, Scryed)
- Music by Tsuneo Imahori (Trigun)
- Produced by Masao Morosawa (Jubei-chan, Ninja Scroll TV) and Shigeru Kitayama (Ninja Scroll Movie, Noir)
- 26 episodes to be released on seven volumes.

Available at these and other fine retailers:

SUNCOAST MEDIA PLAY amazon.com. BUY samgoody

contents

RIGHT: The art of Les Edwards/ Edward Miller is the subject of this issue's Gallery. COVER: Keira Knightley stars as Guinevere in David Franzoni's *King Arthur*, opening July 7.



departments

6 CONTRIBUTORS

8 MOVIES *by Resa Nelson*
Who knew? King Arthur was Roman, not Celtic as many believe.

20 FOLKROOTS *by Terri Windling*
In the company of wolves: Little Red Riding Hood, then and now.

30 BOOKS *by Gahan Wilson and Paul Witcover*
Contemporary horror fantasy mirrors our troubled times.

38 PAST LIVES *by Anastasiya Samusenka*
Knighthood is still in flower at the White Castle Festival in Belarus.

78 GALLERY *by Jane Frank*
Les Edwards gained artistic freedom and a new dimension to his profession by inventing an alter ego named Edward Miller.

90 GAMES *by Eric T. Baker*
Ninja Gaiden for the XBox offers a cool hero and stunning cut scenes.

fiction

44 THE ANGEL'S DAUGHTER *by Jay Lake*
Sometimes the simplest things can undo the most complex locks.

46 THE SMELL OF MAGIC *by Mike Lewis*
Love may smell sweet and betrayal bitter, but revenge has the richest scent of all.

50 THE WATER CASTLE *by Jay Lake*
With great change comes great responsibility. Can one woman shoulder the burdens of the whole world?.

58 WORDS & MUSIC *by Kate Riedel*
More is going on in the mysterious little bookshop than even the experienced fantasy reader might suspect.

62 THE RIGHT GOD *by Richard Parks*
The way of the prophet is never an easy one, but it can help to know which god you're prophesying for.

68 ELFRITHE'S GHOST *by Kij Johnson*
Ghosts are not made of flesh and blood, but they are often made by flesh and blood.

70 THE LAILY WORM *by Nina Kiriki Hoffman*
Although a dragon's heart runs hot, vengeance is a dish best served cold.

84 FALLING WITH WINGS *by Devon Monk*
Choices of the heart can be hard to make, but sometimes our bodies make them for us..

REALMS OF FANTASY (ISSN 1079-1951) is published bimonthly by Sovereign Media Co., Inc., 441 Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 20170, (703) 471-1556. Periodical Rate postage paid at Herndon, VA, and additional mailing offices. REALMS OF FANTASY, Volume 10, Number 6 © 2004 by Sovereign Media, all rights reserved. Copyrights to stories and illustrations are the property of their creators. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. *Subscription Services, back issues, and information:* For fastest service, call 800-219-1187 or write to REALMS OF FANTASY P.O. Box 1623, Williamsport, PA 17703. Single copies: $4.00, plus $1 for postage to Sovereign Media. Yearly subscription in U.S.A.: $16.95; Canada and Overseas: $21.95 (U.S.). Send editorial mail to REALMS OF FANTASY, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. REALMS OF FANTASY welcomes editorial submissions but assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Material to be returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We suggest that you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Sovereign Media for our author's guidelines. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to REALMS OF FANTASY, P.O. Box 1623, Williamsport, PA 17703.**

Fly Away with Eragon!

Epic storytelling in the vein of Tolkien, Le Guin, McCaffrey and Pullman, from the new wunderkind of fantasy, Christopher Paolini.

Book One of the Inheritance Trilogy

TEST YOUR ERAGONKNOWLEDGE!

- Visit Alagaesia.com for new *Eragon* trivia, quizzes, downloads, an audible glossary, and more!
- Sign up for the *Eragon* Newsletter and receive exclusive updates from author Christopher Paolini about *Eragon* and *Eldest*, the next book in the Inheritance Trilogy!

"Full praise to Eragon and I want more! A winner... tip of the hat to young master Paolini." —Anne McCaffrey

"The hottest fantasy title of the moment." —*USA Today*

Also available on CD and cassette from Listening Library®

All art © 2002 by John Jude Palencar

AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD.

AS SEEN ON *THE TODAY SHOW* AND *LATE SHOW WITH DAVID LETTERMAN!*

contributors

ERIC T. BAKER was born in Reno, Nevada, but has lived in Fairfax, Virginia, since 1979. He holds a degree in English from Virginia Tech and was a graduate of Clarion in 1989. Eric sold his first story in 1992, but it was his third sale that appeared in print first. His work has appeared in *Amazing, Fantasy & Science Fiction,* and *Science Fiction Age*.

JANE FRANK, along with her husband Howard, is a well-known and longtime art collector who in 1991 founded the art agency Worlds of Wonder when she discovered how few artists in the sci-fi/fantasy genre were able to gain exposure for their art beyond the opportunities afforded by conventions devoted to the field. In addition to publishing numerous magazine articles and essays on artists and the art of collecting, she co-authored (with Howard) two art books documenting their 30+-year collecting habit: *The Frank Collection: A Showcase of the World's Fantastic Art* and *Great Fantasy Themes from the Frank Collection*, both published by Paper Tiger. *The Art of John Berkey* was published in fall 2003.

NINA KIRIKI HOFFMAN has sold more than 200 stories, five adult novels, three short story collections, and a number of juvenile and media tie-in books. Her works have been finalists for the Nebula Award, the World Fantasy Award, and the Endeavor Award. Her novel *The Thread That Binds the Bones* won the Horror Writers Association Bram Stoker Award. Her available books include *The Silent Strength of Stones* from Avon; *A Red Heart of Memories, Past the Size of Dreaming,* and *A Fistful of Sky* from Ace; *A Stir of Bones* from Viking; and *Time Travelers, Ghosts and Other Visions* from Five Star.

KIJ JOHNSON is the author of several novels and several dozen short stories. Her most recent novel, a Heian Japanese fantasy called *Fudoki*, is out from Tor Books. She's at work on another novel in the same setting, as well as *Kylen*, a two-book series set in Enlightenment London and Central Asia. She lives in Lawrence, Kansas, with her husband, writer Chris McKitterick, a dog (Hope), two cats (Tatsuko and Sanju), two mice (Sophia and Spot), and innumerable June bugs.

JAY LAKE lives in Portland, Oregon with his family and their books, within sight of a 12,000-foot volcano. In addition to *Realms of Fantasy*, in 2004 he will have several dozen stories in print in markets as diverse as *Asimov's, Black Gate,* and *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*. Two books of Jay's short fiction are available: *Greetings from Lake Wu* from Wheatland Press and *Dogs in the Moonlight* from Prime Books.

MIKE LEWIS is a computer consultant who lives in Woking, England. He attended Clarion East in 2002 and his short stories have appeared most recently in *The Mammoth Book of Tales from the Road* and *Electric Velocipede*. He is currently developing a novel set in the same world as "The Smell of Magic."

DEVON MONK lives in Salem, Oregon, with her husband, two sons, and a colorful assortment of friends and family. Her fiction has appeared in such magazines as *Amazing Stories, Talebones, Black Gate,* and a variety of anthologies.

RESA NELSON is a freelance writer and a Clarion '85 graduate. Her fiction has been published in *Science Fiction Age, Aboriginal Science Fiction,* and several anthologies. She acted as screenwriter and/or producer for three independent short films made in the Boston area, which gave her experience ranging from running a casting call to acting as a body double. Resa is currently writing a novel based on "The Dragonslayer's Sword," a short story first published in the premiere issue of *Science Fiction Age*.

RICHARD PARKS is a longtime contributor to *Realms of Fantasy*. His first short story collection, *The Ogre's Wife: Fairy Tales for Grownups,* is available from Obscura Press and contains several stories that were published here first.

KATE RIEDEL lives in Toronto with one poet and two cats. Previous publications include *On Spec, Not One of Us* (in which she has a story upcoming), and *Weird Tales,* as well as *Realms of Fantasy*. Perhaps not coincidentally, she works part time in a second-hand bookstore.

GAHAN WILSON's cartoons are known chiefly because of his affiliation with *Playboy* magazine, but have shown up in periodicals as diverse as *The New Yorker, Weird Tales,* and *Paris Match,* and on the cover of *Newsweek*. Gahan is also a talented writer whose often-macabre fiction has appeared in *Omni* and the original *Dangerous Visions*. He created a CD-ROM entitled *Gahan Wilson's Ultimate Haunted House,* demonic baseball cards, and a telefilm for Showtime. He makes his home on Long Island.

TERRI WINDLING, who originated and still edits the Folkroots column, is a seven-time winner of the World Fantasy Award. She is a consulting editor for Tor Books, and has edited over thirty anthologies, many of them in partnership with Ellen Datlow. She won the Mythopoeic Award for her novel *The Wood Wife,* and has also published children's books, short stories, and nonfiction. She also edits the online Endicott Studio Journal of Mythic Arts, *www.endicott-studio.com*.

PAUL WITCOVER is a writer who lives in New York City. He is the author of the novel *Waking Beauty,* co-author of the comic book *ANIMA,* and is currently finishing up his second novel.

REALMS OF FANTASY

VOLUME 10 NUMBER 6

JOE VARDA
Publisher

CARL A. GNAM, JR.
Editorial Director

SHAWNA MCCARTHY
Editor

SAMANTHA DETULLEO
Art Director

JESSE GUAY
Graphic Designer

LAURA CLEVELAND
Managing Editor

KIMBERLY R. JOHNSON
Editorial Assistant

CARINA GONZALEZ
Editorial Intern

KERRY STINSON
Copy Editor

Contributors:

Eric T. Baker, Jane Frank, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Kij Johnson, Mike Lewis, Jay Lake, Devon Monk, Resa Nelson, Richard Parks, Kate Riedel, Gahan Wilson, Terri Windling, Paul Witcover

MARK HINTZ
Chief Executive Officer

DIANE BONIFANTI
Business Manager

TINA POUST
Comptroller

KATHY PAULHAMUS
MARY NOLAN
SANDRA HILLYARD
Subscription Customer Service

Curtis Circulation Company
Worldwide Distribution

Advertising Offices:

COLIN T. SMITH
Advertising Manager
(703) 733-2163

LAURA VARUOLO
Advertising Production Coordinator
(703) 733-2174

341 Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 20170
703-471-1556 FAX: 703-471-1559
E-mail: lcleveland@sovhomestead.com

Subscription Customer Service and Business Office
The Hart Building, 50 W. Third Street
Williamsport, PA 17701
(800) 219-1187

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Designers of Swords & Medieval Weaponry

Knights Edge® LTD.

Since 1994

FREE Full Color CATALOG within the USA $5 Elsewhere

We are one of the leading designers of functional swords and weaponry....

bringing to you the "Hottest" New Styles!

New Styles are Here!

NEW Rapiers
NEW Claymores
Roman Swords
Medieval Swords
Katana Swords
Ninja Swords
Helmets & More

Stage Steel®

LIVE ACTION STEEL BATTLE READY BLADES AND WEAPONRY
favored by stunt and theater professionals

More of our exclusive design lines:

Ritter Steel — Hand Forged | Functional Swords and Weaponry Forged over Hot Coals!

Ritter Steel Authentics Collection™

Stage Steel Battle Ready Steel Swords

KNIGHTEDGE Steel Hunting Cutlery Made in the USA

Valiant Arms Armour & Weaponry

Knights Edge Ltd. 5696 N Northwest Hwy. Dept RF32, Chicago, IL 60646 USA
773-775-3888 Fax 773-775-3339 Visit us at www.KnightsEdge.com

DEALER INQUIRES WELCOME!

By Resa Nelson

Who knew? King Arthur was a Roman, not Celtic as many believe.

David Franzoni, screenwriter and Oscar-winning producer, hesitates for a moment. He hems. He haws. He stops in mid-sentence. Dead silence. He suddenly switches gears, changing his mind about what he was getting ready to say. He seems to be wagering some kind of internal battle. It sounds like he has a cat in a bag and he's considering letting it out.

It's a tricky thing, talking about movies. It's tough to find the right balance. Say too little, and people may decide against seeing a movie that's right up their alley, assuming it's not for them. Say too much, and it spoils the movie.

He makes a decision. "All right. I'll tell you."

I'm surprised. I didn't ask for anything unusual. I'd simply asked about the type of research he's been doing for his current project.

But it seems like I'm about to get something akin to a cherry on top of a hot fudge sundae.

He commits and reveals the secret, but it's not what I expect.

Lancelot (Ioan Gruffudd), Guinevere (Keira Knightley), and King Arthur (Clive Owen) prepare to fight the Saxons.

It's not about the movie. It's about real life.

He tells me about Dr. Linda Malcor, one of the three experts hired to conduct research for his current film. "She's found King Arthur's tomb. It's in Croatia. Now that's her opinion, and I agree with her completely. She's trying to find the Artorius estate. She's found their summer frolicking grounds, so she knows the estate must be close by. She's sorting this stuff out."

Malcor is a folklorist and the co-author of *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table and the Holy Grail.* She's one of many researchers who believe King Arthur didn't live in a mammoth stone castle during the days of knights jousting in

JOIN THE RESISTANCE

THE SCI-FI CLASSIC ARRIVES ON DVD

ALL 19 EPISODES
OF THE ORIGINAL
TELEVISION SERIES
ON DVD JULY 27

©2004 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. All rights reserved.

their full suits of plate armor. Like his experts, Franzoni believes King Arthur was a real man, but he wasn't the once and future king that most of us envision.

"This ain't your grandpa's King Arthur," Franzoni says about the movie *King Arthur*, scheduled for release on July 7 by Touchstone Pictures.

Franzoni isn't kidding. Anyone who feverishly subscribes to the Celtic origins of Arthur may want to count to ten—starting now. Maybe even take a deep breath.

"We went back to the Dark Ages and tried to sort out the source of the legend. Merlin doesn't fly through the air and turn people into chipmunks. Arthur is a Roman. Despite the Celtic squealing to the contrary, clearly the most likely scenario, the earliest references, are that he was a Roman."

In some ways, bringing King Arthur to the screen has been a life-long journey for Franzoni, and he wants to get it right.

A native of Vermont, Franzoni fell in love with movies when he saw his first Fellini flick. He was a geology major in college and he continued to graduate school, where he got bored quickly. So Franzoni went to Berlin, picked up a motorcycle, and drove it around the world. He spent time in Beirut and Athens. He drove throughout the Middle East. He logged some miles on his speedometer in Australia. But it was somewhere in India that Franzoni realized he wanted to spend his life making movies. So he went to California and began the life of a struggling writer.

Years later, Franzoni struggles no more. Instead, he holds an Oscar in his hands. Maybe one of the reasons for his success is his belief in living life, then writing about it.

"I'm sick of Hollywood movies that are basically new versions of the same old thing," Franzoni says. "Unless these films are about us, or about a new way of rediscovering who we are when we look at ourselves, they're not worth doing. Most of the Roman epics—and I include *Spartacus*—are movies about somebody else."

He's not interested in glorious, shining heroes. He's bored by characters who seem unapproachable, unreachable, unrelatable. He likes the grittiness and honesty of human failing.

Franzoni wrote and produced *Gladiator*. Although nominated for a Best Screenplay Oscar, he lost. However, as one of the film's producers, he won an Academy Award for Best Picture. Several minutes earlier, Russell Crowe had garnered the Best Actor award, which catapulted him into stardom.

Franzoni remembers that night easily. To this day, he's more pleased about Crowe's

Franzoni believes that King Arthur and his knights were members of a Sarmatian cavalry. The Sarmatians were incorporated into the Roman army by Marcus Aurelius.

Oscar than his own. "The best part of it all was when Russell won, because he thought for sure he'd never get it, and I felt he had put in such an incredible performance. I was concerned it would be overlooked because it wasn't about drug addicts in Detroit.

"It was gratifying on a lot of levels, because everyone in town thought we were out of our minds. It was about a gladiator, there were lots of jokes about gladiators, it was Russell wearing a skirt ... all these stupid things that mean nothing, of course. It was expensive. And to be brutally frank, the hero is a guy who kills innocent people and animals for a living."

What could have been "Franzoni's Folly" instead proved to Hollywood that audiences were ready for the return of the historical epics. Films like *Lawrence of Arabia* had thrived in the 1960s, often sweeping the Oscars, but they'd fallen out of favor for decades.

Thanks to the high-tech explosion in special effects during the past several years, moviemakers were able to do something that had never been done before: create a very real and visceral historical vision. James Cameron tested the waters with *Titanic*. His keen attention to historical detail paid off in Oscar gold. But it wasn't until *Gladiator*'s success that other studios realized the potential. Now that *Gladiator* has blazed the trail, plenty of films have followed, from *The Alamo* to *Troy*—and there are plenty more lined up. It seems like a natural next step for Franzoni to examine the legend of King Arthur with fresh eyes. As he did with *Gladiator*, Franzoni took a good look at history first.

When he talks about the historical evidence pointing to King Arthur, he sounds like a kid in a candy store. He asks, "Do you know about the Sarmatians?"

I haven't a clue.

So he tells me. And as he talks, it's pretty clear how much he loves these warriors who lived hundreds of years ago but survive in esoteric books that few of us will ever read.

The Sarmatians began as nomads who came out of the Eurasian Steppes. Moving westward, they displaced the Scythians around the Black Sea. They built an empire. When it collapsed, their society fragmented. They joined up with barbarians.

"When Marcus Aurelius was trying to pacify the barbarians on the German front, during that campaign—about 10 years before the opening of *Gladiator*," Franzoni says, "he defeated a band of Sarmatian cavalry who were fighting with the Germans—I use the word German loosely.

"The Romans, being who they were, instead of wiping them out, incorporated them into the Roman army. They sent one division of the Sarmatian cavalry to Egypt—no one knows what happened to them. And they sent one to Britain. They remained in England up until the withdrawal of Rome as a separate indigenous population, culturally separate, running campaigns up to Hadrian's Wall, which is where they did most of their work."

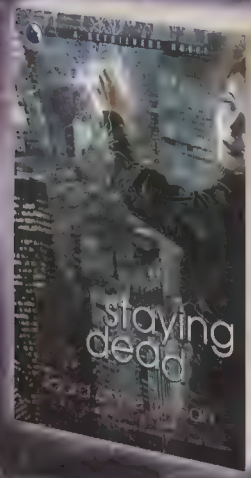
Historians are bound to debate. While many subscribe to Celtic roots, some historians believe King Arthur and his knights were members of a Sarmatian cavalry. For one thing, there's the culture of the Sarmatians. They worshipped swords in the ground and swords in stone. They had a lady in the lake. They had a Holy Grail. Their battle standard was a giant wind sock decorated with the head of a dragon.

And then there's a Roman named Lucius Artorius Castus.

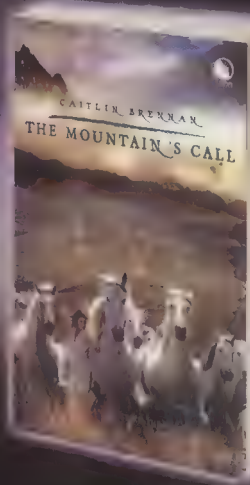
"The circumstantial evidence for Arthurian myth originating with Sarmatians is tremendous," Franzoni says. "The Celtic crowd, they can't bear this. There's no evidence for a Celtic Arthur. In fact, there's a Celtic poem written about AD 600-something, where he's described as part-Roman, part-Britain, which is exactly how I've written the part.

"There are conflicting historical ideas. The Celtic crowd, although I respect them and they've done a lot of research, they're a bit more like the Roswell crowd: 'If it's a UFO, it must be real.' Unfortunately, they lack real

A world you can only imagine



LUNA™



MANHATTAN'S NIGHTLIFE JUST GOT WEIRDER....

Sometimes what a woman has to do to get the job done is enough to give even Wren nightmares....

LAURA ANNE GILMAN weaves with a high level of cleverness, craft and [illegible]

ON SALE NOW

A LAND AT STAKE, THE RIDERS BETRAYED, AND A LONE WOMAN TO DETERMINE THE FUTURE...

An epic tale of a woman cast rejected by all but the gods, whose will, strength and loyalty will determine the future of the empire.

ON SALE IN SEPTEMBER

A World Where The Most Magical Occurrences Come From Within

Light reveals the evil hidden by darkness, and darkness manipulates light to deceive individuals if they stray from their principles.

The door opens. Which will emerge a dragon of light or a dragon of darkness?

The Brazen Serpent Chronicles—Talon of Light

can be ordered at most bookstores

1-4107-6669-1 (Soft Cover)
1-4107-5835-4 (Hard Cover)
1-4107-6670-5 (E-book)

Order Online At
www.Authorhouse.com
www.Amazon.com
www.BarnesandNoble.com

The author delivers on the promise and provides the reader with an excellent story that is hard to put down. -Writers Digest

Visit the Brazen Serpent Chronicles Website
www.brazenserpentchronicles.com

Coming Autumn of 2004
The Cadiveus

Franzoni says, "The thing that's always bothered me about the Arthurian movies is that they're never inhabited by people... The armor is so shiny, you've got to wear sunglasses."

historical credibility—but they really are loud."

Here's how fans of the Sarmatian theory view the possible origins of King Arthur: The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius put a legion—that's 5,500 soldiers—of Sarmatians into Britain in the year 175. Malcor believes Lucius Artorius Castus was headquartered at Bremetenacum, a Roman fort at Ribchester. Several years later, he led troops from Britain to stop a rebellion in Gaul.

It would be a little more than 200 years later that the natives kicked Roman officials out of Britain, gaining independence just before the Goths sacked Rome.

Some historians speculate that King Arthur was born roughly 50 years after the fall of Rome. Sometime in the late 5th century or the early 6th century, Arthur fought 12 battles that made him famous. The last battle was at Mount Badon, where the Britons defeated the Saxons.

So Lucius Artorius Castus lives 200 years before the Romans leave Britain, and it's nearly 100 years later that King Arthur fights his most famous battle. But the movie takes place at the time Rome is pulling out of Britain. How is it possible to reconcile all this?

"We're proposing, through one of our historians, that this is a descendent of Arthur," Franzoni says, referring to the Lucius Artorius Castus, who is the subject of his film.

Franzoni's research team consists of Celtic historian John Matthews, Sarmatian anthropologist Jeannine Kimball, and Malcor. Kimball's work takes her into the Eurasian Steppes near the Black Sea where the Sarmatians lived. The last time Franzoni spoke with her, she'd found the remains of two Sarmatian warrior women with DNA still intact in the marrow of their bones. The film's researchers all believe—to varying degrees—that King Arthur may have been a Sarmatian.

Franzoni describes how he worked with the researchers. "I said, 'Look, here's my premise. I've read stuff, and I'm not an expert—now fill in the blanks.' Meanwhile, let's tell a great story, because what's the point if no one comes to the movie?"

About the story, Franzoni says, "Our basic premise is there's a Roman officer, Lucius Artorius Castus. His mother's British, his father's Roman. He's the commander of the Sarmatian cavalry and has spent his career fighting the people of Britain.

"The Romans are pulling out, and the Sarmatians want to get the hell out because the Saxons are moving in. But before they can leave, they have one last mission.

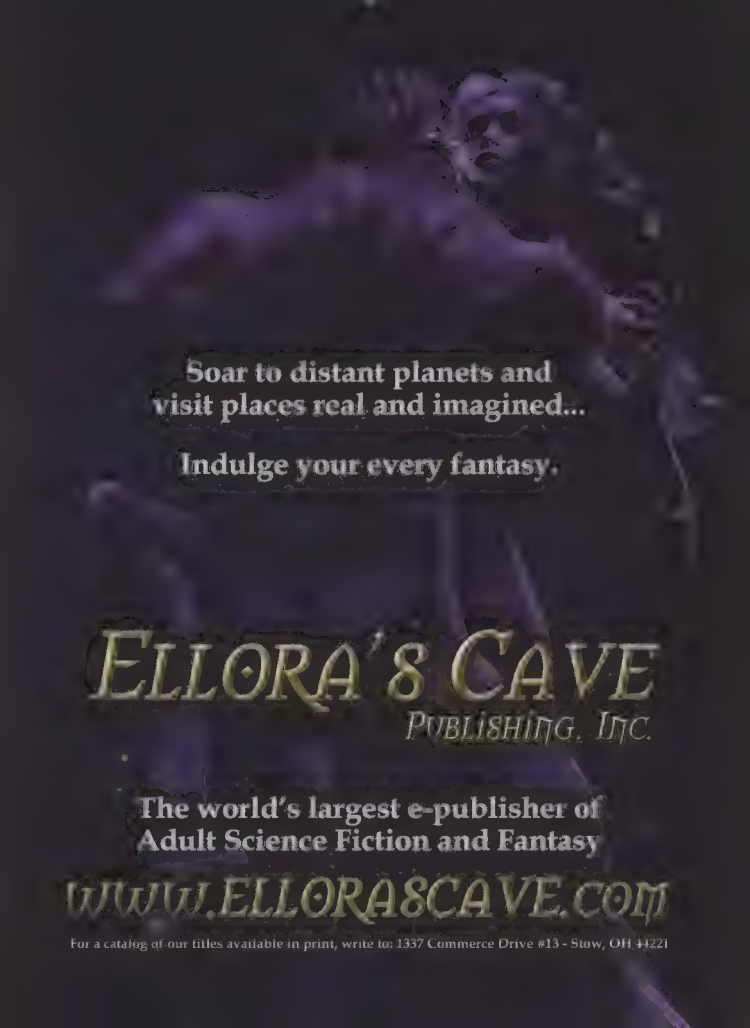
"You can imagine, it's like the fall of Saigon. It's about discovering who they are as human beings."

And yet, despite this new historical slant, the main characters we expect to see in any story about King Arthur are still front and center. Franzoni's clearly excited about the cast.

"Keira is amazing," Franzoni says about Keira Knightley, who stars as Guinevere. "She did a good job."

The British actress is on the fast track to fame today, thanks to the independent sensation *Bend It Like Beckham*, followed by last summer's blockbuster, *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Franzoni and his fellow filmmakers managed to catch Knightley just as her star was beginning to rise.

"She was going off to do fashion shoots," Franzoni says, recalling the time he offered her the role of Guinevere. "She's very straightforward, very easy to work with. Her performance is wonderful."


Soar to distant planets and
visit places real and imagined...
Indulge your every fantasy.
ELLORA'S CAVE
PUBLISHING, INC.
The world's largest e-publisher of
Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy
WWW.ELLORASCAVE.COM
For a catalog of our titles available in print, write to: 1337 Commerce Drive #13 - Stow, OH 44221

"We don t have a lot of stars. We have Welsh actors, British actors, Scottish actors, Irish actors. Mads Mikkelsen, who plays Tristan, is a Danish actor We have people who are real actors. The personality of the shoot was everybody working together to generate the best movie."

King Arthur's "real actors" may not be household names, but they're no slouches. Take Ioan Gruffudd of Wales, who plays Lancelot. If you watch the A&E Channel, you've probably seen Gruffudd star as Horatio Hornblower in a series of made-for-TV movies. If not, you might have seen him in *Black Hawk Down*. Then there's Sweden's Stellan Skarsgard. He first gained attention in a couple of Scandinavian movies, *Breaking the Waves* and *Insomnia*. Hollywood noticed, and Skarsgard expanded his horizons by starring as a math teacher in *Good Will Hunting* and as a demented children's guardian in *The Glass House*.

Creating armor for the actors was one of Franzoni's biggest challenges. When he worked on *Gladiator*, replications of Roman armor already existed. In the end, the filmmakers decided to have armor built for *Gladiator*, simply because it turned out to be cheaper than buying it ready-made.

Their advantage was, ancient Roman armor is popular. There are many Roman reenactors, just as there are many Civil War and Revolutionary War reenactors. It's not that difficult to find examples of Roman armor. It's easy to find experts.

Keira Knightley's Guinevere is a warrior queen in this version of the legend.

But who knows about the Sarmatians and their armor? While some museums have Sarmatian relics, if you go to a prop shop on a movie studio lot and ask if they can pull any Sarmatian armor and weapons off the shelves, you're likely to get a blank stare.

So the filmmakers considered what they knew about the Sarmatians, then took a field trip. They flew by helicopter to Hadrian's Wall and assessed the situation, speculating about what it must have been like for the Romans.

"What you have are Roman soldiers who are like the French Foreign Legion," Franzoni says of the trip to Hadrian's Wall. "They're *out* there. You can't always expect that the latest shipment of high-tech armor is going to get through. So you basically improvise. These guys were building uniforms. They would have done anything. They could have gone to the flea market and gotten a bear skin. I can see the poetic nature of who the knights could have been."

The thing that's always bothered me about the Arthurian movies is that they're never inhabited by people—they're inhabited by ethereal beings. The armor is so shiny, you've got to wear sunglasses.

"These are people. These are guys. They're not Christians. And they're tough."

Despite the film's gritty and realistic approach, rest assured you can look forward to some light hearted moments. The design of the armor is one of the ways Franzoni hopes to the keep the humor in the King Arthur myth. "It became fun, because you could do anything you wanted. You could

make the armor more personalized.

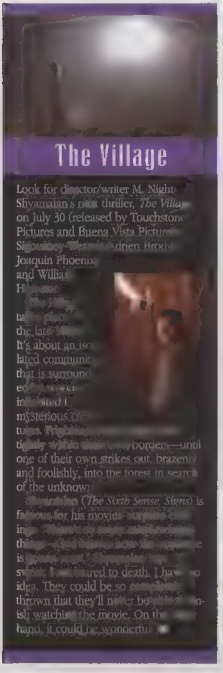
Then again, there's the matter of battle.

"The Sarmatians also had big, freaking swords. The battle scenes have their own personality. They're not like any other battle scenes you've seen before.

I have proposed they were the inventors of the stirrup. That was problematic when I wrote the script. Now I think it's been proved. A recent article about a foot strap in some of the pictographs of the Sarmatians has been interpreted now as stirrups.

Franzoni's keenly interested in getting the historical facts straight, as much as humanly possible. As with everything else in life, it all comes down to a matter of balance.

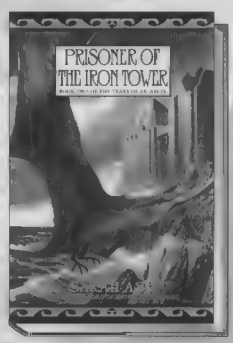
First, making a movie is a collaborative effort. It's a matter of filmmakers negotiating about everything and reaching a point where everyone can accept a final decision. So while Franzoni might have fought for the



Look for director/writer M. Night Shyamalan's next thriller, *The Village*, on July 30 (released by Touchstone Pictures and Buena Vista Pictures. Starring Adrien Brody, Joaquin Phoenix and Willia[illegible]. [illegible] the late [illegible]. It's about an isolated communi[illegible] that is surrounded [illegible] mysterious [illegible] borders—until one of their own strikes out, brazenly and foolishly, into the forest in search of the unknown.

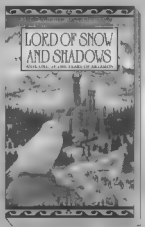
Shyamalan (*The Sixth Sense*, *Signs*) is famous for his movies [illegible] the [illegible] is [illegible] scared to death. I have no idea. They could be so [illegible] thrown that they'll never be [illegible] watching the movie. On the other hand, it could be wonderful.

Enter a world of
SPIRITS AND SINGERS, DAEMONS AND KINGS.



In this second book in Sarah Ash's acclaimed Tears of Artamon series, Gavril Nagarian has rid himself of the Drakhaoul but is now held captive in a prison for the criminally insane, where he spends his days fighting the madness within—while the dangers outside continue to grow.

"Sarah Ash is destined to be one of the bright luminaries of fantasy."
—Dennis L. McKiernan, author of the Mithgar series

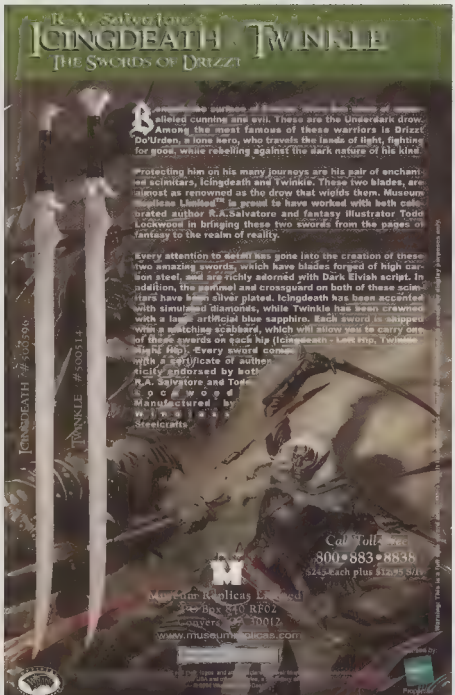


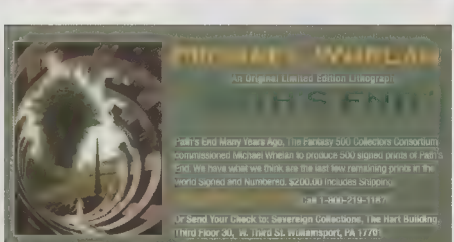
Don't miss the first "fascinating and unpredictable" (*Publishers Weekly*, starred review) novel in the series—available in paperback 6/29!

www.sarah-ash.com
Wherever books are sold
eBook also available

SPECTRA A WORLD APART
Log on to www.bantamdell.com to sign up for Spectra Pulse, the monthly e-newsletter

SPECTRA




An Original Limited Edition Lithograph
Call 1-800-219-1187
Or Send Your Check to: Sovereign Collections, The Hart Building,
Third Floor 30, W. Third St. Williamsport, PA 17701

greatest authenticity possible—for example, in regard to swords—he didn't always win the battle

Second, there's the issue of balancing historical accuracy with storytelling The two don't necessarily go hand in hand Remember the timeline dilemma of Lucius Artorius Castus, Rome's withdrawal from Britain, and the man who most people believe was King Arthur? The two men and Rome's withdrawal span a few hundred years

We've compressed history," Franzoni says What we're trying to do is create the historical feel of what it would have been like to live back there with Rome pulling out, leaving everybody to defend themselves against the Saxons

"We're taking liberties with time. In a specific sense, it's legitimate No one knows when the Battle of Badon Hill was, nobody knows where it was—although the Celts will claim they know everything We're compressing time. It's a fictional piece. We're not trying to say, 'This is exactly what happened' But we're saying, 'This is what was happening during that time. These are the people who were there'

"And I absolutely believe it was the Sarmatian cavalry that the Saxons faced There wasn't anybody else Plus the campaign leading up to Badon Hill, historically, from what we know, was professional, precise, and completely devastating to the Saxons. That would have been a Roman tactic"

Franzoni has an interesting take on historical films. He proposes this. When you travel to another country, it's sometimes easier for you to see what that country is all about than it is for the people who live there Likewise, it's easier for anyone visiting the United States to get the big picture than it is for us

It makes sense It's human nature to become oblivious to your surroundings Sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees—but for someone new to the surroundings, it's much more obvious

"I think removing yourself by using time as a reference point can do the same thing," Franzoni says

Franzoni's upcoming projects include a movie about Hannibal . . the guy who crossed the mountains with elephants, not the serial killer

In the meantime, a keen interest that was sparked years ago in the Cal State library, where Franzoni first discovered a book about the Sarmatians, has come to fruition The thing that really turns me on about King Arthur is the Sarmatians, who really changed the world They get no credit whatsoever, of course To bring them back to life To give them their place in history These guys were alien people in this totally alien land

I wanted to try to embrace the landscape and physical nature of Britain The idea is that you get to know what it must have been like to live back then "

HUNTING LICENSE

Everything and everyone is fair game at Gen Con Indy. Your badge gives you license to track down thousands of potential opponents in TCG, roleplaying, miniatures, board, electronic, and other games. . . and hunt for great deals and treasures in the colossal exhibit hall.

CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS:

- FOUR SLEEP-DEPRIVED DAYS & NIGHTS
- HUNDREDS OF GAME COMPANIES & VENDORS
- 10,000 SQ FT LIFE-SIZE TRUE DUNGEON
- ANNUAL ENnies AWARDS
- 2 GIGANTOR-SIZE ANIME ROOMS
- INFAMOUS COSTUME CONTEST
- ART SHOW FEATURING FANTASY GREATS

TOURNAMENT & EVENT HIGHLIGHTS:

- D&D 30TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EVENTS
- UPPER DECK PRO-CIRCUIT PREMIERE
- DECIPHERCON WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS
- AEG L5R WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS
- DRAGONBALL GT TCG FOCUSED WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS
- WHITE WOLF VAMPIRE: THE REQUIEM LAUNCH & VTES NORTH AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

Also, set your sights on our Sci-Fi/Fantasy Celebrity Guests, including: DAVID CARRADINE *(Kung Fu, Kill Bill)*, WALTER KOENIG *(Star Trek)*, LINDA BLAIR *(The Exorcist)*, and GIL GERARD *(Buck Rogers in the 25th Century)*.

Get even more bang for your buck — save $10 when you pre-register online by July 12 for a 4-day badge.

www.gencon.com

AUGUST 19-22, 2004 • INDIANAPOLIS, IN

UPPER DECK ENTERTAINMENT

CO-SPONSORS

INDY GEN CON THE BEST FOUR DAYS IN GAMING!

DECEMBER 2-5, 2004

APRIL 21-24, 2005

GEN CON, the Gen Con logo, and The Best Four Days in Gaming! are trademarks of Gen Con LLC. All rights reserved. Used under authorization. Guest list subject to change.

ON YOUR GUARD

2337p $26.95 20¢ | 0273p $25.95 20¢ | 1750[] $20.95 20¢ | 1743 $24.95 20¢ | 3236 $16.99p 20¢ | 1057 $26.95 20¢ | 1636 $27.95 20¢ | 3178 $11.99p 20¢ | 2477 $25.00 20¢

0199 $32.95 20¢ | 1909 $13.99p 20¢ | 2750 $18.95 20¢ | 2725 $27.95 20¢ | 1859 $24.95 20¢ | 2253 $22.00 20¢ | 3517 $35.00 20¢ | 3491 $12.95p 20¢ | 1065# $10.99p 20¢

1277* $30.95 20¢ | 9183[] $24.95 20¢ | 8979• $24.95 20¢ | 2170s* $19.95 20¢ | 2451-9999* $14.99p 40¢ | 0224* $24.95 20¢ | 2345-9999 $25.00 40¢ | 1503 $29.95 20¢

30178 $14.00p 20¢
Between Planets; The Rolling Stones; Starman Jones; The Star Beast

2530-99998 $75.85 40¢
The Golden Age; The Phoenix Exultant; The Golden Voyage Omnibus

2568# $60.00 20¢
The Time-Quartet: Wrinkle in Time; A Wind in the Door; A Swiftly Tilting Planet; Many Waters

19018 $14.00p 20¢
A Princess of Mars; The Gods of Mars; The Warlord of Mars

3095# $42.00 20¢
A College of Magics; A Scholar of Magics

22128# $14.00p 20¢
Book 1; Book 2; Book 3

2584P $62.85 20¢
Interview with the Vampire; The Vampire Lestat; The Queen of the Damned

05884P $14.00p 20¢
Dead Until Dark; Living Dead in Dallas; Club Dead

02998 $14.00p 20¢
The Voyage of the Star Wolf; The Middle of Nowhere; Blood and Fire

MEMBERSHIP IS EASY just choose 5 books for $1. Send no money now. You'll be billed shipping and handling, and come when more books are considered. Unless otherwise notified. **Your satisfaction is guaranteed.** If you're not happy with your introductory books, return them within 21 days at our expense and your membership will be cancelled. No, it won't cost anything. **Save up to 65% off publishers' edition prices.** Every book we offer is a high-quality, unabridged hardcover edition printed in large size. Just purchase at least 4 more books at regular Club prices within 2 years. After buying 4 books you may resign at any time or remain a member for as long as you wish. **More savings now.** Buy 4 both books now for just $4.98, plus shipping and handling. The **FREE Club magazine** is sent to you up to 19 times a year, about every 3 weeks. Each issue reviews the Main Selections and a variety of alternate books. **Ordering is risk-free.** Main Selections are sent to you automatically. To cancel shipment—or order other books—simply return your Member Reply Form or contact our Web site by the marked date. Shipping and handling plus sales tax where applicable is added to each order. You'll always have 10 days to decide. If your Member Reply Form is late and unwanted books arrive, you can return them at our expense and we'll credit your account. **Easy ordering** through the mail or via our Web site: www.scifiBC.com. Your online code is located on the order card.

The Science Fiction Book Club® is a registered trademark of Doubleday Direct, Inc. Used under license. All rights reserved. Promotional images used for illustrative purposes only.

THE *SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®* LEADS YOU DEEPER INTO ADVENTURE

START WITH **5 BOOKS FOR $1** WITH MEMBERSHIP

www.JOINSFBC.com

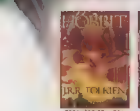
YOUR ONLINE CODE IS LOCATED ON THE ORDER CARD.

Dragonlance: The Annotated Legends
With extensive commentary from the authors throughout, *Dragonlance: The Annotated Legends* is an exciting experience that thrusts you into one of the greatest battles in the Dragonlance saga. *Time of the Twins; War of the Twins; Test of the Twins.*
3020-99998ƒ $24.95 40¢

6569-99998 $65.85 40¢
The Fellowship of the Ring
The Two Towers; The Return of the King

8169-9999ƒ $27.95 40¢

2261-9999 $25.95 40¢



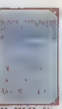
7096 $10.00ƒ 20¢

1362 $30.00 20¢

3350 $30.00 20¢

2220 $26.00 20¢

1453 $10.00ƒ 20¢



8920 $25.95 20¢

2147ƒ $25.95 20¢

2576 $24.95 20¢

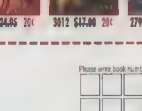
2402 $28.95 20¢

1487 $27.95 20¢

1305 $39.99

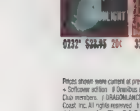
1404 $29.95 20¢

3335 $16.95 20¢



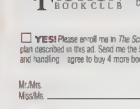
3301 $16.99 20¢

3679 $22.95 20¢

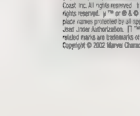


0661 $24.95 20¢

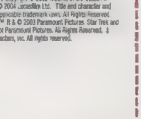
3012 $17.00 20¢



2790 $17.95 20¢



0232* $23.95 20¢



3269 $24.95 20¢

2360 $24.95 20¢

Prices shown were current at press time. *Explicit scenes and/or language • Softcover edition ‡ Omnibus edition. ± Hardcover edition exclusively for Club members. ◊ DRAGONLANCE is a registered trademark by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All rights reserved. ◊ Copyright © 2002 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All rights reserved. ® ™ or © & © 2004 Lucasfilm Ltd. Title and character and place names protected by all applicable trademark laws. All Rights Reserved. Used under Authorization. ™ ® & © 2003 Paramount Pictures. Star Trek and related marks are trademarks of Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved. ♫ Copyright © 2002 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB

MAIL TO:
The Science Fiction Book Club
P.O. Box 6367
Camp Hill, PA 17012-6367

Please write book numbers here

☐ **YES!** Please enroll me in *The Science Fiction Book Club*® according to the risk-free membership plan described as this ad. Send me the 5 BOOKS I have indicated at the right. Bill me just $1 plus shipping and handling. I agree to buy 4 more books within the next 2 years.

Mr./Mrs. _____
Miss/Ms. _____ (please print)

Address _____ Apt _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Home Telephone: (____) _____

Please Sign _____
(Parents of a parent must sign)

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. Membership subject to approval.

If you select a book that counts as 2 choices write the first 4 digits of the book number in one row and 9999 in the next.

SAVE MORE NOW! Send me this book now. Bill me an added $4.98, plus shipping and handling.

Please write book number here

Books that count as 2 choices are not eligible.

10 ### ### 64 92 ### JS202 ← Online Code

By Terri Windling

In the Company of Wolves: Little Red Riding Hood, Then and Now

"Little Red Riding Hood" is one of the best loved fairy tales of all time—yet few now know the original story as it was told in the French countryside long before Charles Perrault penned his famous version in 1697. The oral version, called "The Grandmother's Story," has its tap roots in ancient Asian folklore but was largely shaped by the rural traditions of France from the Middle Ages onward. The heroine of "The Grandmother's Tale" does not wear the famous red cap (or hooded cloak)—a detail added by Perrault—nor does she require rescue by a passing hunter, which was added by the Brothers Grimm. "Little Red Riding Hood," as we know it today, is a cautionary tale warning little girls of the perils of disobedience, but the older story is a complex one of female initiative and maturation.

All illustrations by Heinrich Anton Donndorf from Grimm's Fairy Tales (c. 1850).

"Little Red-cap" strays from the path to grandmother's house in the Grimm Brothers' more child-oriented version of the tale

"The Grandmother's Tale" comes in a variety of forms, but in general the story goes like this:

A woman had finished her baking, so she asked her daughter to take a fresh *galette* and a pot of cream to her grandmother who lived in a forest cottage. The girl set off, and on her way she met a *bzou* (a werewolf).

The *bzou* stopped the girl and asked, "Where are you going? What do you carry?"

"I'm going my grandmother's house," said the girl, "and I'm bringing her bread and cream."

"Which path will you take?" the *bzou* asked. "The Path of Needles or the Path of Pins?"

"I'll take the Path of Pins," said the girl.

"Why then, I'll take the Path of Needles, and we'll see who gets there first."

The girl set off, the *bzou* set off, and the *bzou* reached Grandmother's cottage first. He quickly killed the old woman and gobbled her up, flesh, blood, and bone—except for a bit of flesh that he put in a little dish on the pantry shelf and a bit of blood that he drained into a little bottle. Then the *bzou* dressed in Grandmother's cap and shawl and climbed into bed.

When the girl arrived, the *bzou* called out, "Pull the peg and come in, my child."

"Grandmother," said the girl, "Mother sent me here with a *galette* and a cream."

"Put them in the pantry, child. Are you hungry?"

"Yes, I am, Grandmother."

"Then cook the meat that you'll find on the shelf. Are you thirsty?"

"Yes, I am, Grandmother."

"Then drink the bottle of wine you'll find on the shelf beside it, child."

As the young girl cooked and ate the meat, a little cat piped up and cried, "You are eating the flesh of your grandmother!"

"Throw your shoe at that noisy cat," said the *bzou*, and so she did.

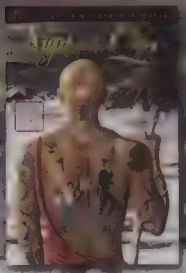
As she drank the wine, a small bird cried, "You are drinking the blood of your grandmother!"

"Throw your other shoe at that noisy bird," said the *bzou*, and so she did.

When she finished her meal, the *bzou* said, "Are you tired from your journey, child? Then take off your clothes, come to bed, and I shall warm you up."

"Where shall I put my apron, Grandmother?"

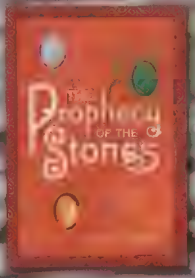
"Throw it on the fire, child, for you won't need it anymore."



Outlaws of Moonshadow Marsh, Book One:
Sign of the Qin
[illegible]
[illegible]
$5.99

The Supernaturalist
By Eoin Colfer
Hbk 0-7868-5148-1
$16.95

Tour de force Fantasy



[illegible]

The Prophecy of the Stones
By Flavia Bujor
Hbk 0-7868 1835 2
$16.95

HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN • miramax books

First chapters available online at
www.hyperionteens.com

"Where shall I put my bodice, Grandmother?"

"Throw it on the fire, for you won't need it anymore."

The girl repeats this question for her skirt, her petticoat, and her stockings. The *bzou* gives the same answer, and she throws each item on the fire. As she comes to bed, she says to him, "Grandmother, how hairy you are!"

"The better to keep you warm, my child."

"Grandmother, what big arms you have."

"The better to hold you close, my child."

"Grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"The better to hear you with, my child."

"Grandmother, what sharp teeth you have!"

"The better to eat you with, my child. Now come and be beside me."

"But first I must go and relieve myself."

"Do it in the bed, my child."

"I cannot. I must go outside," the girl says cleverly, for now she knows that it's the *bzou* who is lying in Grandmother's bed.

"Then go outside," the *bzou* agrees, "but mind that you come back again quick. I'll tie your ankle with a woolen thread so I'll know just where you are." He ties her ankle with a sturdy thread, but as soon as the girl has gone outside she cuts the thread with her sewing scissors and ties it to a plum tree. The *bzou*, growing impatient, calls out, "What, have you finished yet, my child?" When no one answers, he calls again. "Are you watering the grass or feeding the trees?" No answer. He leaps from bed, follows the thread, and finds her gone.

The *bzou* gives chase, and soon the girl can hear him on the path just behind her. She runs and runs until she reaches a river that's swift and deep. Some laundresses work on the river bank. "Please help me cross," she says to them. They spread a sheet over the water, holding tightly to its ends. She crosses the bridge of cloth and soon she's safe on the other side.

Now the *bzou* reaches the river, and he bids the women help him cross. They spread a sheet over the water—but as soon as he is halfway across, the laundresses let go. The *bzou* falls into the water and drowns.

Numerous variants of "The Grandmother's Tale" were collected by French folklorists in the 19th and 20th centuries in the Loire basin, the Nivernais, the Forez, the Velay, the northern Alps, and the Italian Tyrol. Italo Calvino published a version from Abruzzo in his collection *Italian Folktales* (1956). Called "The False Grandmother," in this story a hungry ogress takes the place of the wolf—but in other respects, the story is quite similar to the French folktale. Just as in the French story, the girl is offered a grisly meal—beans (really teeth) boiled in a pot and fritters (really ears) in a frying pan, and she, too, escapes by feigning the need to relieve herself outside. Calvino had doubts

that "The False Grandmother" actually came from the Italian oral tradition, suggesting it may have derived instead from published versions by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. Yet the Abruzzo tale contains elements that link it clearly to the older folk tradition: the cannibal meal, the toilet ruse, the heroine who plots her own escape . . . all things that disappeared as the tale moved from oral transmission to print.

In the oral tales, the girl must chose between two paths of needles and pins. In some versions she chooses pins, in other versions she chooses needles, and in a few versions the *bzou* chooses the path for her. Folklore scholars have different theories on what precisely these paths are meant to represent. Sewing and spinning terms are ones we find often in fairy tales, for the making of cloth and clothes was a constant part of women's labor prior to the 20th century. Such work was often done communally, in spinning rooms and around the evening fire, when gossip was shared and tales were told to relieve the monotony of the tasks at hand. Small wonder then that needles, pins, distaffs, spindles, and other symbols of women's work make frequent appearances in folk stories largely told by female storytellers, and some folklorists attach no more significance to the two different paths than this. Paul Delarue and Marie Soriano viewed the choice between pins and needles as a nonsense question, a false choice (for both are equally prickly) a deliberate absurdity. Yvonne Verdier disagreed in her fascinating essay "Le petit chaperon rouge dans la tradition orale," first published posthumously in 1995.

Verdier had extensively recorded and studied the folklore, traditions, and rituals of rural women in remote areas of France, and she brought her wider understanding of traditional women's stories to her examination of "The Grandmother's Tale."

In villages Verdier studied, she found that girls were sent at puberty to spend one winter with local seamstresses—a passage of time that marked a girl's change from child to young woman. Writing about a village in the Châtillonnais, she noted, "This had less to do with learning to 'work,' to sew and use needles than with refining herself, with polishing herself and learning to adorn herself, to dress up. The seamstress expressed this by saying of her young apprentices, 'They have been gathering pins.' When they reached the age of fifteen, both the winter with the seamstress and the ceremonial entry into the age group consecrated to St. Catherine signified their arrival at *maidenhood (la vie de jeune fille)*, that is, permission to go dancing and to have sweethearts, of which the pin seemed to be the symbol. It was by offering them dozens of pins that boys formerly paid court to girls, it was by throwing pins into fountains that girls assured themselves a sweetheart."

While pins marked the path of maidenhood, needles implied sexual maturity. "As for the needles," wrote Verdier, "threaded through its eye, in the folklore of seamstresses it refers to an emphatically sexual symbolism." Indeed, in some parts of Europe, prostitutes once wore needles on their sleeves to advertise their profession. The versions of The Grandmother's Tale where the girl chooses to take the Path of Needles might well imply that the heroine is trying to grow up a bit too quickly.

At the end of the path, the werewolf awaits, disguised as the heroine's grandmother. We assume that he's wearing his human shape now, which makes the deception a bit more convincing, and yet—as Marina Warner points out in her fairy tale study *From the Beast to the Blonde*—it's odd that the granddaughter can't tell the difference. Perhaps, Warner suggests, it's because there's a similarity between the wolf and the crone. The grandmother lives apart in the forest—an unusual place for a helpless old woman, but a common dwelling for wise women, witches, herbalists, and other *femmes sauvage*. Warner writes, "In the witch-hunting fantasies of early modern Europe they [wolves and crones] are the kind of beings associated with marginal knowledge, who possess pagan secrets and are in turn possessed by them. Both dwell in the woods, both need food urgently (one because she's sick, the other because he hasn't eaten in three days), and the little girl cannot quite tell them apart."

Details

of

Beauty,

Color

and

Action...

"I've gotten to the point where I collect only the best ..in color and detail. I found them here. They seem to jump to life with all their grace and movement!" - Britt Olson (dragon collector)

Window of Wonders

$60.00
Free Shipping

DRAGONSITE

Dragons for the Serious Dragon Collector.

Three Ways to Order Window of Wonders and many more:

www.thedragonsite.com

800.922.7716

1220 Waterville-Monclova Rd
Waterville, Ohio 43566

We're not surprised when the *bzou* slaughters the grandmother—that is, after all, what werewolves do. But the granddaughter's gruesome meal is shocking, particularly in those versions of the tale where the method of cooking and seasoning is elaborately described. Yvonne Verdier likens this ritual meal to a sacrificial act, a physical incorporation of the grandmother by her granddaughter. Such a scene is reminiscent of a wide variety of myths in which a warrior, shaman, sorcerer, or witch attains another's knowledge or power through the ritual ingestion of the other's heart, brain, liver, or spleen. But Verdier looks at this part of the story in more symbolic terms. "What the tale tells us," the scholar conjectures, "is the necessity of the female biological transformation by which the young eliminate the old in their own lifetime. Mothers will be replaced by their daughters and the circle will be closed with the arrival of their children's children. Moral: grandmothers will be eaten."

The slow striptease then demanded by the wolf hints at another kind of appetite, as does the fact that the *bzou* is not just a wolf, but also a man. Although focusing on those aspects of the tale that speak the language of female initiation, Verdier also acknowledges the powerful role of the wolf at the center of the story. He is more than just a symbol of the dangers of sexual deception, he is the agent of change. "At the crossroads when she chooses the paths, he is at the origin of the choice; it is when she is face to face with him, under his gaze and at his demand, that she incorporates her grandmother and undresses. This is as much to say that he leads the game . ." He leads, but he does not win—for in the folktale (unlike Perrault's retelling), she is not eaten by the wolf. She sees through the *bzou*'s tricks at last, takes his measure, and shrewdly escapes him.

The werewolf is finally destroyed, not by a passing woodsman or hunter, but by a group of women engaged in traditional women's labor. Verdier comments. "This double role held by the laundresses—on the one hand allowing the girl to pass, thereby rescuing her, on the other drowning the wolf, killing him—is consistent with their role in the social reality of village life. In fact the job of assisting in 'passages,' of helping in childbirth and helping people to die, is held—at least in the Châtillonnais—by one and the same person, an aged woman, a woman who can at the same time handle the swaddling and the shroud, who washes infants as she washes the dead. If the laundresses bring about the death of the wolf, they bring about the rebirth of the girl."

Looking at "The Grandmother's Tale" within the context of rural French history, we should also remember that the story comes from a time when wolves were still a real danger and people of all classes still believed in the existence of werewolves. As German folklorist Marianne Rumpf has documented, France was positively rife with werewolf trials from the 15th to the 17th centuries—a masculine counterpart to the witch hysteria of the time. In werewolf trials, men stood accused of shape-shifting, killing and devouring children, as well as of incest and other unnatural acts. These men transformed into wolves, it was said, with the help of salves purchased from the Devil. Any man might be a wolf in disguise, and any wolf, a man. In 1598, to give just one example, a man named Jacques Raollet was tried as a werewolf in Angers, Touraine—at a time and place when Perrault's own mother might have witnessed these events. Raollet was eventually declared insane and placed in a mental hospital, but other men were hung and burned for crimes supposedly committed as wolves. Rumpf points out that the regions of France where folklorists found "The Grandmother's Tale" being told were also the very regions where werewolf trials had once been widespread.

By the end of the 17th century, when Perrault published his "Little Red Riding Hood," popular belief in werewolves had dwindled, at least among the upper classes. Educated people generally disdained the "backwards" folklore of the countryside—but that was about to change, due to a group of Parisian writers. These writers, congregating in the influential literary salons of Paris, created a vogue for magical stories, for which they coined the name *contes des fées*, or fairy tales. The salon writers drew inspiration from peasant tales of magic and enchantment—but they reworked this material, dressing it up in rococo language and aristocratic clothes, penning stories that commented on life in the court of Louis XIV. In many respects, the salon fairy tale movement was the fantasy genre of its day—lively, inventive, popular with readers, and held in suspicion by the literary establishment (in particular because it was a movement dominated by outspoken women authors). The salon tales proved to be so popular that they were eventually collected in forty-one volumes in the *Cabinet des fées* and were also reprinted and translated in smaller editions across western Europe. Simplified versions of the stories reached the lower classes in the pages of the *Bibliotheque Bleue*—inexpensive chapbooks sold by traveling booksellers—and many tales then filtered back down into the groundwater of the oral tradition.

Although not the first or the only successful fairy tale writer to emerge from the Paris salons, Charles Perrault is the author whose tales were most often reprinted and are still read and loved today. Perrault was an influential civil servant in the court of Louis XIV, a prolific writer on a variety of subjects, and a member of the French Academy. He wrote his fairy tale collection, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, during the final years of a busy life—and probably little dreamed that this is what he'd be remembered for three hundred years later. Like the other *salonnières*, Perrault used themes and characters drawn from peasant tales, turning them into droll little stories for adult readers of the upper classes. Unlike a number of the other salon writers, however (including his niece, Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier), Perrault maintained traditional ideas about the role of women, and his tales demonstrated the "correct" behavior expected of women of his class. His heroines are uniformly beautiful (whereas we know nothing of the appearance of the granddaughter in "The Grandmother's Tale"); they also tend to be hapless creatures—either passive saints or active fools.

The heroine of "Little Red Riding Hood," one of the eight stories in Perrault's *Histoires*, is a pretty, naive child, doted on by her mother and grandmother. Perrault gives her a red *chaperon* to wear—a fashionable little hat, not a hood, that was generally made out of velvet or satin. Red would have been an unusually flamboyant color choice for an unmarried girl, more modest attire, the text implies, might not have attracted the attention of the wolf. But attract him she does, and worse, she stops to talk with him, "not knowing any better." She tells him where Grandmother lives, whereupon he suggests a race to the house. He runs, while she foolishly dawdles, amusing herself with butterflies and flowers. (Here again the text implies that the heroine's fate is her own blessed fault.) Perrault eliminates the cannibal meal and the details of the girl's striptease, merely telling us that the girl undresses and climbs into bed beside the wolf. When she says, "Grandmother, what big teeth you have," the wolf gives his well-known reply: "All the better to gobble you up!" And then he pounces, eats her up, and there the story ends. Perrault finishes with a moral, making the point of his story crystal clear. "Now there are real wolves, with hair pelts and enormous teeth," he writes, "but also wolves who seem perfectly charming, sweet natured and obliging, who pursue young girls in the street and pay them the most flattering attention. Unfortunately, these smooth-tongued, smooth-pelted wolves are the most dangerous of all."

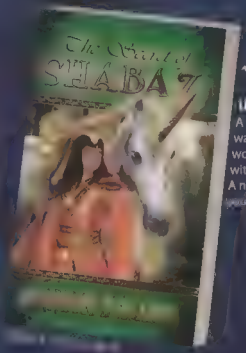
Once again, let's look at this tale within a historical context, for it was published in 1796 for a very particular audience: aristocratic readers in the court of Louis XIV. The Sun King's court was famed for its wealth, its intrigues, and its sexual excesses, particularly as practiced at the king's sumptuous playground of Versailles. (Read the letters of the Marquise de Sévigné for a glimpse of this fascinatingly decadent society.) At the

Ghosts, Unicorns, and Crystal Dragons...

Just some of what waits for you inside these great books from Medallion Press

If you found a bridge on the other side, would you cross it?

Two men on separate paths make a discovery that will change their lives and alter their souls, forever.



Why do unicorns cry?

A noble unicorn, an old warrior elf, and a young woman are forced into a war with the Dark Lord.

A novel to be enjoyed by both young adults and adults.

More Than Kayel

by Rick Taubold

ISBN# 0-9743639-8-

www.medallionpress.com

same time virginity in young brides was absolutely insisted upon, for marriage was a business arrangement contracted between two families, and a girl's market value decreased sharply if her virginity was compromised Perrault's story addressed the subject of seduction and rape—but rape as it was understood at the time, not as we define it today Fathers had the absolute legal right to determine whom their daughters would marry—and a man who seduced or married a young woman without her father's consent was guilty of rape, regardless of the wishes of the woman in question To avoid this occurrence, daughters were often kept locked in convents until they married to prevent romances and elopements Perrault's own wife had been raised in a convent, emerging shortly before their marriage, and Perrault had laid eyes on her only once before the wedding

At the same time, certain women—particularly the influential women who hosted the Parisian salons—were agitating for greater freedom for their sex Within the salons, men and women could mix more casually than was possible at court, they could converse about art and politics and meet on more equal terms. Perrault himself was a frequenter of the salons (one of them run by L'Héritier), and as an academician he championed Modern culture, which was generally more favorable to women But in his tales he consistently stripped folk heroines of the power of self determination, holding up modesty and demur good manners as the feminine ideal By lacking these things, Red Riding Hood walks blindly into the jaws of the wolf, and her fate is as merciless as that of girls seduced by wolves in human skin The wolves are only doing what comes naturally, it's female behavior that is under scrutiny here. As Catherine Orenstein writes in *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, "Perrault's 'girls are *bien faites* and *gentilles*' of the aristocracy His warning is not simply to girls, but to the well-bred, educated women of high society who, in inviting men and women together in mixed company, set a dangerous precedent. Perrault's wolf is the dapper charmer of Parisian high society, seducer of young women and a threat to the family patrimony—he is, as one folklorist has called him, the 'unsuitable suitor,' who insinuated his way into the best beds in town, deflowering young women and robbing their value as virgin pawns in the *marriage de raison*"

"Little Red Riding Hood" was a popular tale, and it soon spread beyond the borders of France. As it became well known, elements from Perrault's story (such as the red *chaperon* and the foolish heroine) slipped into the oral tradition just as though they'd always been there. When the Brothers Grimm published their version of the story, "Little Red-cap," one hundred years later, they convincingly proclaimed it as part of the oral folk tradition of Germany Contrary to public perception, however, the stories published by Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm in their famous collection of German folktales did not come straight from the mouths of

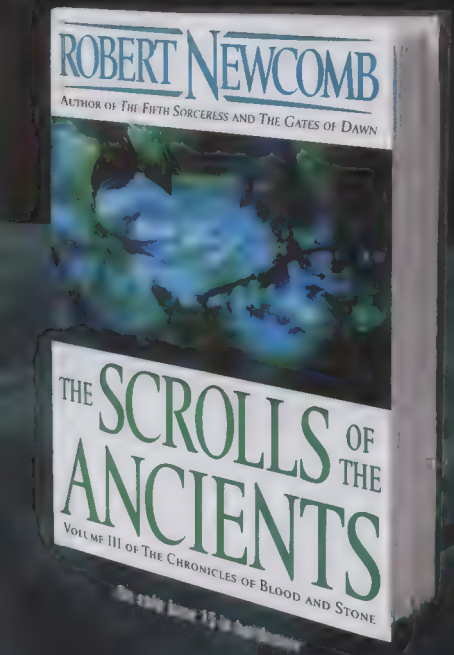
stout German peasants Many tales came from their circle of middle-class friends, who had heard them from nursemaids and governesses (some of whom were French), and whose retellings bore the influence of literary tales from France and Italy. The Grimms collected "Little Red-cap" from Marie Hassenpflug (of French Huguenot ancestry)—a tale complete with red hat and gobbling wolf that clearly derives from Perrault They then altered the story for publication, as they did with many of their tales—particularly in the later editions of the collection, aimed more and more at children (The first edition had been geared toward scholars) First, the Grimms added a warning from the mother instructing Little Red-cap to stay on the path, which shifted the emphasis of the tale to the girl's disobedience Whereas Perrault had warned girls to be modest and chaste lest they be gobbled up by the wolf, the Grimms warned them to mind the rules and stay on the straight and narrow They also changed the ending, adding a hunter who comes to save the day He cuts the wolf's belly open and out steps Grand mother and Little Red-cap, as good as new. The wolf's belly is then filled with stones, which causes him to fall down dead Just in case we don't get the point, there's a second ending appended to the Grimms' retelling in which Little Red-cap encounters a second wolf, but this time she's a good little girl. She stays on the path and reaches her Grandmother's house in safety.

"Little Red Riding Hood" became popular across the English Channel in the middle of the 19th century when the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm took Victorian England by storm. The red cap then became a red cloak and hood like those worn by English country women, and it's in this guise that the heroine of the tale has been known to us ever since Advances in printing methods led to the rise of the children's book industry, and Victorian editors—following in the footsteps of the Grimms—continued altering fairy tales to make them suitable for younger and younger children. Some publishers found even the Grimms' edited renditions of fairy tales too harsh, and soon there were versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" in which the huntsman comes to the rescue *before* the wolf pounces on the girl "In England and America," notes folklore scholar Jack Zipes, "sweet, innocent, and helpless Little Red Riding Hood suffered through hybrid adventures. That is, the Perrault and Grimms versions were often mixed together, and, whether the plot was developed in verse, prose, theatrical scenes, or illustrations, there was a general tendency to make Little Red Riding Hood into a Victorian middle-class lass whose virtue is threatened because she forgets to control her sensual drives and disobeys her superego mother."

With a few exceptions, it was not until after World War I that writers began to reexamine the fairy tale. Then we begin to see it used in literary works that were not expressly aimed at younger readers; such as Charles Guyot's *The Granddaughter of Little Red Riding Hood* (1922), Milt Gross's *Sturry from Rad Ridink Hoot* (1926), and James Thurber's wonderful, wry tale *The Girl and the Wolf* (1939) [For an in-depth look at early 20th century versions of the tale, see *The Trials of Little Red Riding Hood* by Jack Zipes] By the end of the 20th century, the pendulum had fully swung, and fairy tales could be found once again on shelves of adult literature. Echoing the fairy tale movement of 17th-century France, the writers of the new *contes des fees* were largely (but not exclusively) women, using the stories to comment on life in the 20th/21st centuries Two primary texts of the new movement were *Transformations* by Anne Sexton (1971) and *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter (1979), both of which contained powerful reworkings of "Little Red Riding Hood." In *Transformations*—a volume of seventeen poems based on the themes of classic Grimms' fairy tales—Sexton used

For the kingdom of Lurraca,
a new harmony is close at hand.
But a nameless horror is closer still . . .

"Surprisingly original . . . Firmly in the George R. R. Martin camp of realistic fantasy . . . it leaves you wanting more."


ROBERT NEWCOMB
AUTHOR OF THE FIFTH SORCERESS AND THE GATES OF DAWN
THE SCROLLS OF THE ANCIENTS
VOLUME III OF THE CHRONICLES OF BLOOD AND STONE

Prince Tristan and his sister Shalisha are the Chosen Ones, prophesied to unite the opposing magics of the dark Vagaries and the benevolent Vigors. But somewhere there is a *third*. An unwitting pawn . . . possessed of untold power. And if the forces of darkness reach him first, there will be unspeakable consequences.

volumes in Robert Newcomb's
and Stone

THE FIFTH SORCERESS & THE GATES OF DAWN

Available now wherever books are sold

www.delreydigital.com

DEL REY

"Little Red Riding Hood" to explore the subject of deception—the lies we tell and the lies we believe. In *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter's "The Company of Wolves" was a sensual fever-dream of a story that skilfully manipulated the themes, the symbols, the very language of "Little Red Riding Hood." In "The Werewolf," in the same collection, Carter re-examined the fairy tale from a different angle, taking a more historical, less psychoanalytical approach in this dark rendition.

In the years since Sexton's and Carter's ground-breaking volumes, the field of fairy tale literature has become a lively one, but to seek out its treasures, readers must travel to many different parts of the bookstore. Due to the idiosyncrasies of the modern publishing industry, this type of literature is published under a variety of labels mainstream fiction, fantasy fiction, historical fiction, horror fiction, feminist fiction, and young adult fiction. A number of novels and stories make use of the themes of Little Red Riding Hood, including the following

Novels: *Wolfy* by Gillian Cross (1990), winner of the 1991 Carnegie Medal, is a rich, engrossing novel set in contemporary London involving wolves, IRA terrorism, and the complexities of family relationships. *Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District* by Manbo Argueta (1998) is another award winner, this one set on the streets of El Salvador. It's a brutal, haunting political novel with tenderness at its heart. *Darkest Desire: The Wolf's Own Tale* by Anthony Schmitz (1998), is a quirky little novel in which the wolf meets the Brothers Grimm and tells them his story.

Short Stories: "Wolfland" by Tanith Lee, first published in her fine story collection *Red as Blood* (1983), is a deliciously gothic tale set in 19th-century Scandinavia. "I Shall Do Thee Mischief in the Woods" by Kathe Koja, from *Snow White, Blood Red* (1993), is a dark, sharp story that forces us to re-examine the roles of predator and prey. "Little Red" by Wendy Wheeler, from *Snow White, Blood Red* (1993), is a disturbing contemporary tale about wolves whose skin is on the inside, and the ways that young girls can be preyed upon. "The Apprentice" by Miriam Grace Monfredo, from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* (November 1993), mixes fantasy, mystery, and fairy tales in a poignant exploration of the subject of child abuse. "The Good Mother" by Patricia Galloway, from *Truly Grim Tales* (1995) reworks the fairy tale into a post-nuclear-disaster science fiction story. "Riding the Red" by Nalo Hopkinson, first published in *Black Swan, White Raven* (1997), is an extraordinary story about sex and female power, influenced—at least in the rhythm of the language—by the author's Caribbean background. "Wolf" by Francesca La Block, from her urban fairy tale collection *The Rose and the Beast* (2000), is another story using the fairy tale to explore the subject of childhood sexual abuse. "Little Red and the Big Bad" by Will Sheryl, from *Swan Sister* (2003), is a sly urban version of the story, street-wise and sassy.

There are also many good reworkings of "Little Red Riding Hood" over on the poetry shelves. Olga Broumas explores familial relationships between women in her "Little Red Riding Hood," from *Beginning With O* (1977). Roald Dahl's "Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf," from *Revolting Rhymes* (1983), is a hilarious poem in which the wolf is no match for a little girl with a gun. Gwen Strauss's disturbing poem "The Waiting Wolf," from *Trail of Stones* (1990), is one that should not be missed. "Waiting in this old lady's ruffled bed, I am all calculation," says the wolf as he justifies his behavior and awaits his tender prey. Alice Wirth Gray's "On a Nineteenth Century Color Lithograph of Red Riding Hood by the Artist J.H.," from *What the Poor Eat* (1993), turns the tale into a police report, examined from multiple points of view. "In a tupperware wood, mix child and hoot. Stir slowly. Add wolf," begins "Journeybread Recipe" by Lawrence Schimel, from *Black Thorn, White Rose* (1994). "Serve swaddled in a wolfskin throw, cradled in a basket and left on grandmother's doorstep." In the same volume, the narrator of "Silver and Gold" by Ellen Steiber is asked how it was that she could not manage to tell her grandmother from a wolf. Perhaps, her doctor suggests, she was actually living with wolves all along. The heroine of Carol Ann Duffy's "Little Red Cap" knows precisely why she followed the wolf. "The wolf, I knew, would lead me deep into the woods, away from home, to a dark tangled thorny place lit by the eyes of owls." The poem comes from Duffy's splendid collection *The World's Wife* (1999). In Lawrence Syndal's "Grandmother," from *Columbia #37* (1999), the old woman muses on her time in the belly of the wolf. "I lay me down between his ribs and let each sighing lung massage the ache from these old bones." Sinking into the dreams of the wolf, she is not pleased to be rescued. Other "Little Red Riding Hood" poems can be found in two excellent collections: *The Poets' Grimm*, edited by Jeanne Marie Beaumont and Claudia Carlson, and *Disenchantments*, edited by Wolfgang Mieder.

Dramatic adaptations of "Little Red Riding Hood" include Tex Avery's wickedly salacious cartoons. *Little Red Walking Hood* (1937), *Red Hot Riding Hood* (1945), and *Little Rural Riding Hood* (1949), as well as Disney's first animated short, *Little Red Riding Hood* (1922). Shelley Duvall's *Faerie Tale Theatre*. *Little Red Riding Hood* (1983) starred Malcolm McDowell as the Big Bad Wolf and Mary Steenburgen as the heroine. Angela Carter's story "The Company of Wolves" became a wonderfully evocative film of the same title, directed by Neil Jordan in 1984. Carter wrote the screenplay with Jordan and is reputed to have disliked the end. (In the film, a dreaming young girl is awakened when a pack of wolves bursts into her home. In the story, the heroine tames her wolf lover and sleeps safely in his arms.) *Cannon Movie Tales. Little Red Riding Hood* (1987), a rendition set some time during the Middle Ages, tells the story of the daughter of a village lord, her evil uncle, and an enchanted wolf. *Freeway* (1996) is a rather dreadful film that turns the story into a contemporary serial killer flick. Reese Witherspoon plays the heroine, and Kiefer Sutherland plays the urban wolf. Far more worth seeing is *Little Red Riding Hood*, a short film directed by David Kaplan (1997)—a surprising and sensual version of the story that's definitely not for children.

If you'd like to know more about the history of "Little Red Riding Hood," there are quite a few good books to chose from. For an introduction to the tale, including a primer on fairy tale history, I recommend *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* by Catherine Orenstein (2002). It's a lively, entertaining book, written for casual readers rather than folklore scholars. Jack Zipes presents numerous versions of the tale from Charles Perrault's to Angela Carter's, along with an excellent essay on the subject, in his useful book *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (1993). In *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook* (1989), Alan Dundes presents critical writings on the tale from a wide range of folklorists, including Wolfam Eberhard's essay on Asian variants. "The Story of Grandaunt Tiger." For a general history of fairy tales, including "Little Red Riding Hood," try *From the Beast to the Blonde* by Marina Warner, *Twice Upon a Time* by Elizabeth Wanning Harries, and *Touch Magic* by Jane Yolen. Recommended articles: "Little Red Riding Hood in Oral Tradition" by Yvonne Verdier, *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-tale Studies*, Vol. 11, Numbers 1-2 (1997). "Red Riding Hood. An Interpretation from Anthropology" by Mary Douglas, *Folklore*, #106 (1995); and (for fun) "Little Red Riding Hood Revisited" by Russell Baker, *The New York Times Magazine* (January 13, 1980).

The characters in familiar fairy tales have a way of sinking deep into our psyches. Charles Dickens claimed "Little Red Riding Hood" as his first love and felt that if only he could have married her, he would have known perfect bliss. Yet "Little Red Riding Hood" was changed through the years, diminished, punished, literally gobbled up. By knowing and retelling older versions of her story, and by re-imagining her in fiction and poetry today, we reclaim the spirit of girls everywhere who can face down the wolves in their lives and outwit them.

Grand Opening · Seattle
June 18, 2004
The excitement is rising!
Special Charter Memberships
Available Now
Get in on the ground floor
and you'll be light years
ahead of the crowd!
SEE TOMORROW TODAY AT:
SFM™
SCIENCE FICTION MUSEUM
AND HALL OF FAME
UNDER THE SPACE NEEDLE AT SEATTLE CENTER.
MAKE CONTACT AT WWW.SFHOMEWORLD.ORG.
THE SPACE NEEDLE IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK AND IS USED WITH PERMISSION
SFM
AND HALL OF FAME

By Gahan Wilson and Paul Witcover

Contemporary horror fantasy mirrors our troubled times.

Three of the very best writers in the horror fantasy field have turned themselves into editors by mutual consent and jointly put together one of the best best fantasy collections to appear in quite some time. Each one of these talented fellows contacted writers of their native lands and skillfully employed pain or fervor to wrap them up into showing the world what kind of stuff Aussies, Brits, and Yanks, respectively, were made of when it came to dishing out ghastly notions to chill readers' bones to the core.

Painting: 1998 by Terry Oakes/ ...& Words

Ian Graham's first novel, Monument, *tells the story of Ballas, a mercenary thief, and murderer.*

Viewed as a contest, I am afraid ***Gathering the Bones*** (edited by Jack Dann, Ramsey Campbell, and Dennis Etchison, Voyager/HarperCollins, UK, paperback, 560 pp.; a U.S. edition was published by Tor) is something of a failure since no one of these three great English speaking powers appears to have bested the other two, but it succeeds spectacularly as a grand demonstration of the skill of native English authors as a group to raise formidable goose bumps and hints at the lurking, highly promising possibility that it might provoke three authors from, say, French-speaking lands to turn into editors and strike back with an anthology also joined linguistically. If that's followed by several kindred enterprises, before you know it we'll either have World War III or universal peace at last. One can only wait and see. In the meantime, before these important events roll around, I suggest you take the time to leisurely savor the excellent stories in this book.

They vary widely. There's a marvelous range of topics and a remarkable variety of fantastic notions, but reading this really spectacular joining together of widely varied authors from astonishingly different climes has made visible a sort of consistency about contemporary horror fantasy I don't think I ever really focused on before. I realize now I've been mulling it over on some level ever since I first came across and raved on and on about those brilliant stories of Robert Aickman, who is significantly mentioned in the introduction jointly written by the three editors.

Far from being escapist literature, as is so often claimed, all these stories seem to be quite astonishingly observant of events in the real world. Maybe it's because the world surrounding them—and us!—is in such a remarkable state of turmoil and undergoing such cataclysmic transitions. However, unlike many spooky stories of the past involving peaceful, even cozy environments whose tranquility is noticed and profoundly disturbed by some eerie intrusion, the weird wonders and monsters and grotesque happenings featured in these stories are, in spite of being every bit as imaginatively shocking as any in those tales, oftentimes hard put to hold their own against the bizarreness of the ordinary daily events taking place around them in those stories.

Also, the observers, characters and relatively ordinary modern people who are encountering these apparitions are very often nearly as weird, if not more so, as any of the spooky critters or bizarre events they encounter during the course of the tale being told, which turns out to be a great help in

FROM THE BESTSELLING DARK-HUNTER SERIES

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
SHERRILYN KENYON

DARE TO ENTER THE WORLD OF THE DARK-HUNTER...

They are Darkness...
They Are Shadow...
They are the Rulers of the Night...

Neither human or Apollite, the Dark-Hunters stand between mankind and those who would see mankind destroyed. They are the Guardians.

As spiritual brethren to the Dark-Hunters, the Were-Hunters, and Dream-Hunters go where their kindred cannot—guarding the universe and completing the Pyramid of Protection.

DON'T MISS **NIGHT PLAY**, COMING THIS AUGUST!

[illegible] kind. Were-Hunter Vane Kattalakis—half wolf, half human, and all attitude—has to control his destiny and the fate of one woman in **NIGHT PLAY**.

[illegible]

Visit www.Dark-Hunter.com

[illegible]

their being convincingly represented. Not at all uncommonly, the angel or demon or ghost or whatever finds itself every bit as awed and/or frightened by the humans it runs into as the humans are of it.

Personally, I find this a fine expansion of the old forms that not only keeps the charm and effect of that traditional approach, but gives it considerably more depth and impact. I think a fair equivalent would be the old-time explorer adventure tales of yesteryear that have been hugely improved as it's more and more dawned on their authors that the "natives" encountered in far off, exotic spots are every bit as human as their bold heirs.

Another excellent development is the increasing use of fantasy as a first-rate perch to view the foibles of the real world. It's obvious this is no new notion—consider Swift's *Gulliver*—but it's more and more becoming a staple and many of the stories in this book show the use of fine, new twists and subtleties in this area.

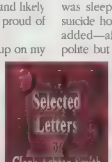
All in all, this is as rich a stew of really good writing as you could ask for and likely to make you more than ordinarily proud of being an English speaker.

Though I confess I am brushing up on my French in eager anticipation of the coming riposte!

A very good place to go to absorb far deeper ruminations than mine above on spooky stories is an excellent little magazine called ***All Hallows: The Journal of the Ghost Story Society*** (Ashtree Press, Ashcroft, BC, Canada, 152 pp.). Edited by Barbara Roden who, with her husband Christopher, created and manages the marvelous Ashtree Press, it is gladly contributed to by some of the very best authors, artists, and critics of the dark fantastic and definitely not to be missed if that's to your taste.

All Hallows is "thrice-published"(Ms. Roden's phrase) each year in February, June, and October. Its small type allows the maximum packing of its pages with highly enjoyable gossip, articles, and criticism of and about spooky fiction, fact, and films and includes all sorts of odd and charming extras such as a superbly cranky and opinionated letters-to-the-editor collection ("The Haunted Post-Bag") and, so help me God, a regular series by a George R. Featherstone, bless his heart, which boldly devotes itself to "looking at neglected or obscure works in the field of the supernatural story," a noble exploration that my heart finds totally and completely irresistible.

These things are penned by a wide variety of figures ranging from towering legendary types such Ramsey Campbell to the somehow familiar to the almost willfully unknown Campbell contributes an essay to this issue on the recklessness of his attempt to make big money as an author of crime fiction which also involves many other truly hilarious confessions of failure including a very, very funny plot synopsis for a book that came to the poor bastard once while he was sleeplessly tossing in bed during the suicide hours of the night and to which he added—after long weeks of reflection, a polite but decidedly negative reaction from his agent, and an at least partial return of his critical faculties: "Do we give even a fifth of a shit about these cut-out puppets?"



There's a page for Websters called Spooks.com and an obituary column that will have you gratefully recalling the weathered faces of sweet, old character actors from old horror films and obscure novels you'd long forgotten but which scared you way back when. There are very nice little bios on the contributors including one about the above-mentioned George Featherstone, who turns out to be a minister of the Church of England with a degree from Manchester University who is interested in folk music, old fishing boats, and industrial archaeology, bless his heart again. And as if all those goodies weren't enough, there is also a generous sprinkling of illustrations, some of which are very good indeed.

I hope you subscribe.

It is hard to describe the mind-bending impact Clark Ashton Smith had on me when I first read him. I was a weird kid who had gotten into fantasy by reading the stories printed in science fiction magazines. I enjoyed these stories very much. The bug-eyed monsters were my special favorites and it was great fun making grownups eyes bulge by telling them how fast you'd have to make a rocket ship go before the thing went orbital and then escape velocity.

But somehow I knew, deep down inside, that the bulk of these stories didn't even begin to wrap themselves around the glittering hugeness of the realm of space in which their adventures were supposed to take place. I can remember staring into the night sky above the Midwestern flatlands and wondering if the guys who wrote those stories had ever really looked up there and seen all those stars.

Another thing that bothered me was what struck me as being an incongruous smugness about the space travelers. It annoyed me how the business of circling around Mars, even landing on it, even dealing with all Martians encountered, was done by the book in a routine sort of way.

Now, I realize that these authors were quite right, that the sort of person who is good at sitting coolly in an absurdly awkward spacesuit while manipulating involved computers mounted onto the front ends of huge tubes full of exploding chemicals is very likely to believe the best way to do it is to reduce it to a routine and do it by the book. That is more than likely why NASA tends to avoid poets and painters and carvers of funny little statues, which is to say people like Clark Ashton Smith.

The main thing that blew me away about Smith's work, outside of the breathtaking, genuinely magical beauty of his writing—which had a skill and sweep and craftsmanship light-years beyond anything encountered in the majority of science fiction stories—was that even if his astronauts (a word that wouldn't be invented until years later by Arthur Clark) began their adventures with a cocky attitude, they all eventually discovered that they were very small potatoes indeed in the vastness of outer space. Most of them were one way or another destroyed by the strange perils they encountered and that—most excitingly different of all from the general SF story pattern—their imaginatively executed extinctions were never ever heroic and almost always insultingly ironical.

I couldn't get enough of it.

Now good old Arkham House has done what they did first with Howard Phillips Lovecraft and then others: they have brought together, with the skilled editing of David E. Shultz and Scott Connors, a collection of the author's letters (***Selected Letters of Clark Ashton Smith***, Arkham House, Sauk City WI, hardcover, 417 pp., $35.95) that shows you the man behind the dreams and fantasies as he was seen by those who

"AN ASTOUNDING DEBUT . . ."

THE LAUNCH OF A TRULY AWE INSPIRING FANTASY SERIES

Gardens of the Moon

Volume One of the Malazan Book of the Fallen

Steven Erikson

E[illegible] bloodshed, and treachery. Crowned [illegible] Empress Laseen turns her predatory [illegible] of the Free Cities, the gods themselves [illegible] make a play for the fate of the land. Sorcerers and soldiers, noble-born and common folk [illegible] the Malazan empire [illegible]

Gardens of the Moon is epic fantasy of the highest order. A spellbinding page-turner by an outstanding new voice.

"FIRST IN SCOPE AND IMAGINATION. In terms of mythos, not since Tolkien have we seen the conversion of legend into fabulous history become as powerfully and richly rendered."

"THE MASTERWORKS OF IMAGINATION may be the high water mark of epic fan[illegible]"
Glen Cook, author of The Black Comp[illegible]

"COMPLEX, CHALLENGING. Erikson's strengths are his grown up characters and his ability to create a world every bit as intricate and messy as our own."

Available Now in Hardcover!

knew him when he was alive and struggling and dreaming up the wonderful works for which he is remembered

I think it's particularly touching to see, up close and vulnerable, a creator of fantastic dreams in the flesh In a way it's not all that much of a contrast to read an author of stories of day-to-day life writing about his or her day-to-day life, but when you've got somebody you know is intimately familiar with the doings of strange gods and appalling demons, someone who repeatedly and convincingly has taken you to fabulous worlds and skillfully guided you through astounding landscapes, it is really something of a surprise to hear that person sigh unhappily about tardy checks from publishers and loved ones who disappointed him and funny little aches in the fingers, or to hear him brag about fixing leaky plumbing or boast about a clearly doomed little side business he's trying to put together so he can afford to buy this or that

One of the main treats in a book like this is that you not only get to read how the letter writer talks to the person he's writing to, but how he talks about some other person he's written to or who has written him and so on and so on. It has a wonderfully revealing hail of mirrors effect and you get to see it morph through decades

It's more than a little scary how well a book like this reveals deeply hidden psychic rifts and peaks in even the most careful and guarded writers It is really more than a little scary

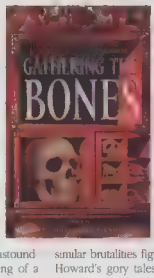
The letters are particularly interesting since they reveal all sorts of intimate things about particularly interesting people From George Sterling to Howard Lovecraft with August Derleth and Samuel Loveman in between with sprinklings of Robert Bloch and Frank Belknap Long, it's a rich mix

By far the best thing about it is the triumphant way Smith emerges from it all. I have read many letters of his in numerous other collections but confess that because I really do admire this man, I was just a little bit wary about reading this almost total exposure of him.

But I need not have worried He's an even better fellow than I'd thought

Superficially I'd say ***Gates of Empire and Other Tales of the Crusades*** (by Robert E Howard, edited by Paul Herman, Wildside Press, Holicong PA, hardcover, 262 pp, $39 95) is pretty iffy so far as political correctness is concerned since it's a collection of truly spectacular war stones that very bloodily concerns itself with a prior encounter of Western and Muslim powers not altogether unrelated to a contemporary conflict unfortunately taking place as I write

Many of the same place names and highly



similar brutalities figure in both of Robert E Howard's gory tales and today's television news. I assume there will eventually be works of fiction based on what is presently taking place, although it's difficult to hazard a guess as to the tone these fictitious depictions will take since that will depend very much on how the ongoing hostilities resolve themselves

Actually, though, because Howard took an interesting, rather cynical view of war there's no cause for participants on either side of the present combat since, as Fred Blosser points out in his excellent introduction to this book, Howard's point of view was the tired and weary one encouraged by the horrid ravages of World War I and and the awful depredations of the Depression Quite accurately, Blosser points out that Howard's view of battle is far removed from heroic John Wayne epics and much more along the lines of those of Kurosawa or Sergio Leone When the battle's racket finally dies down in these latter films and in Howard's epics, the survivors of both sides very often equally tend to the sour opinion that much more was lost than was gained in the process of the struggle

The really important thing about this rip roarer of a book is that it just barely manages to hold within its covers no less than eight of Howard's best tales of oversized action that feature some of the most entertaining brawlers ever penned. Say what you will about the Crusades themselves, but you must admit they did inspire Howard to write these wowsers and for that we owe them a considerable debt of gratitude

Gahan Wilson

Monument, Ian Graham, Ace, New York, trade paperback, 400 pp , $14 00, ISBN: 0-441 01135-7

Reading through the fantasies that come to me for review, I despair, not because so many are poorly written (that's just Sturgeon's Law: "Ninety percent of everything is crud."), but because so many are fundamentally dishonest. By which I mean that their authors do not grapple with questions of real moral significance—they only pretend to do so They write by rote, producing the equivalent of television dramas that follow a predictable story arc, touching in a superficial way on all the requisite emotions as they progress inevitably toward a platitudinous conclusion as salutary as it is insipid These are fast food reading experiences: super-sized books as alike and nutritious, as a thousand Happy Meals

Ian Graham's first novel is an Unhappy Meal. Set in a world where no one is better than he or she should be, and most are considerably worse, *Monument* tells the story of Ballas, a mercenary, thief, murderer, and drunk who makes Conan the Barbarian look like an effete altar boy. If Charles Bukowski had been a fantasy writer, it's easy to imagine that he might have penned a book featuring a main character like Ballas ugly, violent, greedy, amoral, misanthropic, emotionally and psychologically scarred, and gloriously, unapologetically alcoholic It's a tribute to Graham's skills as a novelist that we come to care about this appalling individual, a mirror image of the sternly theocratic society whose thuggish agents, for most of the book, relentlessly hunt him down; ostensibly for crimes of theft and murder, of which he is guilty, but really because, all unknowing, he constitutes a dire threat to the continuation of their regime and, perhaps, to the existence of humanity itself

While recovering from a wholly deserved beating administered by a vengeful victim of his thievery, Ballas stumbles across a pretty trinket in the possession of the man who has, at some personal risk, treated his injuries. Reasoning (to use the word loosely) that this trinket will provide the means to end his painful state of unaccustomed sobriety, he steals it. But the trinket is more than a valuable curiosity—it is a magical artifact from an extinct race known as the Lectivin Stronger, swifter, and with greater magical powers than humans, the Lectivin were defeated and eradicated only because they were outnumbered by their otherwise weaker human adversaries, who could sustain staggering losses in battle after battle and still win the war by slow attrition. Examining the artifact, Ballas inadvertently triggers it and something happens to him.

What, exactly, I will not give away, for it is the central mystery and irony on which the novel hinges. But, as a result of his experience, Ballas finds himself sentenced by the Pilgrim Church to death upon the Penance Oak—a sturdy tree to which the severed heads of criminals are nailed to remind the populace of the fate of all enemies of the Church Ballas, blessed with extraordinary luck, as well as courage, cunning, and somewhat atrophied but still

New from DAW Books
A "Fascinating"* Stand-Alone Novel by
Tad Williams
New York Times Best-Selling Author of the *Otherland* Series

"A masterpiece of fairy-tale worldbuilding, with a Faerie land that eerily mirrors the real world... a wondrous tale set in a fascinating world, with a classic reluctant hero and a cause worth cheering for."
*—*Locus*

"A big, involving adventure...an accomplished and ambitious fantasist."
—San Francisco Chronicle

Theo Vilmos' life is about to take a real turn for the worse. He is drawn from his home in Northern California into the parallel world of Faerie, for, unknown to him, he is a pivotal figure in a war between certain of Faerie's powerful lords and the rest of the strange creatures who live in this exotic realm.

"Strong storytelling and memorable characters make this stand-alone cross-world fantasy the author's best work to date."
—Library Journal

"Williams' imagination is boundless."
—Publishers Weekly (Starred Review)

"An addictive world with its own history, mythology, internal rules, and rich, intricate culture."
—Salon

0-7564-0181-X $7.99

DAW Books, Inc.
Distributed by Penguin Group (USA)
Visit DAW online at www.dawbooks.com

TAD WILLIAMS' TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO EPIC FANTASY
SHADOWMARCH
COMING NOVEMBER 2004

Ebook ISBN 1-55404-110-4
Paperback ISBN 1-55404-095-7

WITHIN THE SHADOW OF STONE

...a journey through legend and myth to the time of the ancient standing stones—to a world where warriors are bound to the stone and the Shroud Born walks within the mist.

~ When your need is truly great, the stone shall not forsake. ~

"This magical tale takes a unique twist on the myths surrounding the standing stones."
~ Tina Morgan Fiction Factor

Available from
Double Dragon Publishing
http://www.double-dragon-ebooks.com

Special order through Ingram, or online at www.Amazon.com, www.Barnesandnoble.com www.Borders.com, or www.BAMM.com

formidable fighting skills, escapes his captors and sets out on a desperate quest for an all-but-mythical land called Belthiran, where the Pilgrim Church has no power. Along the way, Ballas gains and betrays—and is betrayed by—a rogue's gallery of companions, including, most notably, a sour old man named Crask and his daughter, Heresh.

In a traditional fantasy, Ballas would fall in love with Heresh, her love would redeem him and give him the strength and moral authority to confront his pursuers and vanquish the tyrannical Church. That doesn't happen here. Although Graham wavers at the end and departs slightly from the established moral trajectory of his novel, it is very much to his credit, and likely to be a source of continual amazement to readers, just how rigorously and uncompromisingly he does adhere to his bleak and grotesque (if at times humorous) vision, which must be counted, among other things, as a withering Goya esque critique of what the genre has become. Indeed, as I read on, I was increasingly amazed that a major publisher would bring out a fantasy so determinedly antiheroic and antiromantic, and whoever at Ace is responsible for acquiring this brave novel has my admiration as well as my thanks. There are far too few Bukowskis and Celines in the fantasy genre, now, to that short list another name can be added.

The Fourth Circle, Zoran Zivkovic Ministry of Whimsy, Florida, trade hardcover, 256 pp., $27.00, ISBN 1-892389-65-7

Winner of the 2003 World Fantasy Award for his novella *The Library*, which appeared in the anthology *Leviathan 3* (itself a 2003 World Fantasy Award winner), Zoran Zivkovic is an immensely talented fabulist whose work is somewhat reminiscent of Italo Calvino's wry and delightfully surreal postmodern fictions. Generally, his approach is to take a seemingly simple and commonplace idea or concept or object—sometimes helpfully indicated in his titles, as with the above-mentioned novella—and then approach it from a variety of perspectives—with wit, ingenuity, and Looking Glass logic. The effect on readers is something like being in the audience of an intellectually stimulating magic show, one whose tricks make you gasp in wonder but also leave you speculating about the nature of everyday reality. Very often—and again *The Library* is a good example—his works consist of more or less disparate sections that are obliquely connected; that is, their cohesiveness and cumulative impact depend less upon the traditionally linear stepping-stones of plot and narrative than upon more obscure links of symbol, image, and metaphor, and upon structural juxtapositions as well. Zivkovic's technique, a kind of literary Cubism, not only deconstructs the familiar, but it puts it back together in new and surprising ways.

While *The Fourth Circle* is Zivkovic's first novel, it is actually the eighth of his fictions to be translated into English and published in the United States. It is one of his strongest and yet most elliptical works, fascinating both in its own right and as the precursor of later fictions that, as in some time-travel paradox, his English-speaking fans will have already read.

The novel opens with a nameless man walking across an alien landscape toward a destination he knows only as "the Circle." All his memories are gone, including knowledge of who he is and where he comes from. At first blush, this seems like a science fiction novel, the sort in which various puzzles of purpose and identity are laid out for readers and then solved over the course of the book. But appearances are deceiving. First, while Zivkovic (the author of an Encyclopedia in his native Yugoslavia) employs a number of science fictional tropes and devices, *The Fourth Circle* turns out to be a visionary fantasy. And second, while many of the puzzles set out in the novel *are* resolved, the resolution usually leads to still greater mysteries, one exfoliating out of another.

Zivkovic's weird, at times frustrating, ultimately engaging story is parceled out among narratives set in a number of distinct yet related realities. Some feature familiar individuals from history, such as Stephen Hawking and Archimedes. Others involve aliens from other worlds. One is set in an alternate world dominated by a religion whose strangeness is only intensified by its resemblance to Christianity. There is a metafictional world where Sherlock Holmes, Watson, and Moriarty are real people. And a world in which a computer genius living deep in an Indian jungle creates an artificial intelligence and gives it a personality seemingly derived from an understanding of female psychology based on stereotypes from 1950s or 1960s TV shows, only to have his creation raped and impregnated by a monkey.

The Fourth Circle transcends these constituent parts like a poem whose luminous effect can be experienced but never quite successfully analyzed line by line. Yet, I cannot unequivocally praise the novel. Despite its intelligence, accomplishment, and its high literary quality, my enjoyment was marred by the author's treatment of his female characters. The AI is by no means the only female in the novel to think and behave in a belittlingly stereotypical manner. I found this tendency baffling, for there is no reason within the logical framework of the novel for every female character to be expressed in this fashion. In the end, I put it down to an authorial blind spot, but I could not dismiss it. Because I genuinely admire Zivkovic's work, I regret that my recommendation of *The Fourth Circle* cannot be entirely without reservation.

Paul Witcover

NEW FROM KENNETH OPPEL

AUTHOR OF THE INTERNATIONALLY BEST-SELLING SILVERWING TRILOGY

Kenneth Oppel has proved himself one of the most versatile and successful storytellers around with the award-winning Silverwing trilogy, including the recent *Firewing*. Now he creates an entirely new fictional world with *Airborn*, a thrilling fantasy in which humans fly, but the airplane has never been invented.

Set in the early 20th century, *Airborn* centers around a fatherless young cabin boy aboard an airship. It's a world in which pirates and shipwrecks are all too common and life-and-death battles can be played out hundreds of feet above land—or sea.

Hc 0-06-053180-0 $16.99

"From the soaring success of his Silverwing trilogy, Ken Oppel takes his readers even higher in the skies. . . . The action is at times heart-stopping, the dialogue lively and convincing. Oppel's images take lasting root in our memories."

—*Quill & Quire* (starred review)

EOS

harperteen.com

www.airborn.co

By Anastasiya Samusenka

Knighthood is still in flower at the White Castle Festival in Belarus.

His armor shines in the sunbeams and his coat of arms embodies nobility His sword serves him as a weapon and cross during a campaign, and his dagger as needle and fork during the halt He is faithful to the Law of Honor, and infringing on it bears strict punishment. He is a warrior and lover who fights in the name of his lady He is a knight, a knight of the 21st century He didn't disappear with Middle Ages He is among us waiting to be recognized

The historical reconstruction movement is spread throughout the world Belarus is one of the advance posts of this movement in Europe where many knighthood clubs are concentrated Outsiders have little knowledge of the daily life of the clubs, but it is a real society with its own laws As in medieval society, in every historical club there is a strict hierarchy of members Each member has his or her place with its special responsibilities. For example, the men forge their armor and practice their fighting skills during the drill Ladies sew clothes and manage the club's dairy

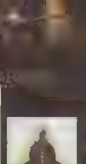
All photos © 2004 by Anastasiya Samusenka

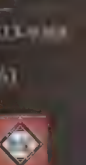
European knights of the 21st century construct their own armor using medieval techniques and do battle for their ladies

The most famous Belarusian historical clubs are Knagi Guf (a reconstruction of the Litovskoe Grand Duchy of the 13th 14th centuries). The Order of the North Temple (a reconstruction of the Templars' monastic order), the Wild Hunt knights fellowship (a reconstruction of the Litovskoe Grand Duchy of the 14th-16th centuries as well as a secular knights' order), the Sword and Raven union, and the Snow Leopard knight's clan. Mostly you can see the members of clubs (knights and noble ladies) during the medieval festivals The best-known one is the White Castle annual international festival of medieval culture and music that takes place in Belarus every spring. Knights from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic, the Baltic countries, and even the United States, Spain, and Britain take part in this great event This festival is not connected with any historical occurrence or battle like the festivals in Grunwald (Poland), Novogrudok, and Zaslavl (Belarus) It's just a great international competition for knights to test their skills in battle and undergo a baptism by fire and for ladies to take part in a costume competition, show off their beauty, and conquer the hearts of knights And attendees have the opportunity to travel into the past. Visitors have the feeling that a time machine has transported them to the Middle Ages. They feel the spirit of the epoch because the trappings of knighthood are all around them

By The Sword, Inc.

Quality Reproductions





...The Sword, Inc. is one of the largest Medieval / Renaissance dealers in the US carrying 1000's of exciting products. You can browse and ordering from our established firm. Our website allows our customers fast delivery on their orders!

We've supplied major motion pictures, theme parks, Renaissance weddings, theatrical plays, re-enactment groups and of course ... decorators and collectors. We can accommodate ...

24hrs, 7 days a week!

Questions: 888-244-3561

Mon.-Fri. 9:00am-5:00pm est.

By The Sword, Inc.
P.O. Box 07282
Ft. Myers, FL 33919

http://www.bytheswordinc.com

Almost all of the knights are armorers who make their own shells and weapons according to medieval canon, using historical archives and scripts. The variations in armor depend on the country the knights are from and the period of the Middle Ages they reconstruct. In the earlier period of the Middle Ages, up until the 14th century, a knight's outfit consisted of mail, a shield, a helmet and a fighting weapon. From the 14th century on, the knights began to wear armor over their mail.

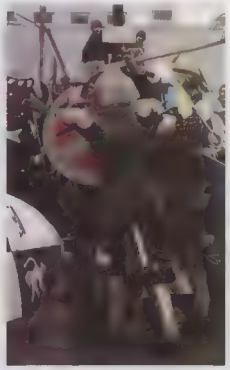
The technology of making shells is very specific. The knights consult historical scripts and medieval pictures for information on how to construct historically accurate armor. Then they make patterns, which are transferred to sheets of steel and cut out. After the armor sections are shaped and tooled, the sections are finalized and the armor is ready for the knight to wear. Some of the shells are rather simple, but the armor of the most noble knights is etched with ornamental designs (using the medieval process of making pictures on steel armor with acid).

Before battle, every knight puts on special padded clothes under his mail and/or armor to protect his body. The armor is attached with narrow leather straps sewn to the soft clothing. Mail is constructed by netting rings of steel wire. It is a difficult process that requires research and practice. Festival attendees can try on a knight's shell, but they must be able to bear the weight of the mail (22 pounds) or armor (77 pounds). Now, as was the case centuries ago, there is only one way to clean the mail, which consists of 25,000 to 35,000 steel rings. The mail is put in a barrel filled with sand which is rolled until the shine returns to the mail.

Once the knights are in arms, they are ready to do battle. During the White Castle festival, attendees can observe several kinds

of medieval fights. A tournament is a series of individual battles between two knights who cross swords against each other. Participants in the tournament are the most professional and proficient at sword fighting. The most dangerous and fascinating events are the bugurts, group fights in which many warriors take part. They are great examples of medieval combat. Among the most well-known bugurts are The Fight of Scarves and The Seizure of the Banner. Before the Fight of Scarves, medieval ladies tie one of their silky scarves around the hand of every knight, during the battle, the group of knights that conquers more opponents and cuts off more scarves wins. In The Seizure of the Banner, the side that seizes the enemy's banner first celebrates the victory. For the most part during the bugurt, knights smite each others' hips and thighs, however, sometimes they wound each other seriously. For example, during the battles of last year's White Castle festival, one knight got his nose broken and the fingers on the hand of one of the other knights were almost torn off. Fortunately, the ambulance was ready for such cases and helped the heroes. Serious accidents are rare and usually happen because the warriors go into the fight in damaged armor.

Knights' battles are not the only events you can see during the festival. There is a medieval fashion show where ladies and knights model unique costumes of the Middle Ages. Only people whose clothes demonstrate the best correlation with the standards of medieval fashion can take part



in this competition. The clothes need to be made from natural materials, to be sewn according to medieval patterns, and fully hand made.

The concept of "fashion" did not appear until the 12th century, before that, everyone wore what they had and liked. Through the centuries, fashion changed with the ideal of feminine beauty. In the 12th century a lady was considered beautiful if she was very thin with wasp waist, and had very long, plaited hair. Only unmarried women could be bare-headed, married women had to wear a headdress. Eastern design motifs were in vogue at this time and appeared in various patterns on clothes. The primary reason for this was that the knights who went on Crusades returned with silk and woolen materials and adornments for their ladies. The clothes were tight, with side lacings and long belts used to emphasize the waist. Dresses had wide sleeves and trains. The underwear was the long chemise. Generally, respectable women wore three layers of clothes: an overdress, an underdress, and a chemise. Over these layers they wore overcoats that were padded with fur in wintertime. The overcoat was as expensive as its lining.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, the ideal woman became more full-bodied: the clothes were wider and gaunt proportions were in

Other Times... Other Worlds...

MOON MAGICK
Rae Morgan
www.liquidsilverbooks.com

Book Two in this HOT series! The veil between good and evil is torn. Only one witch and one man can restore the balance.

". . . a wonderfully drawn tale of suspense and eroticism."--Fallen Angel Reviews.

WINTERTIDE
Donnea Sinclair
www.medallionpress.com

--An award-winning novel of sorcery, treachery and love!-- A centuries-old war between witches and sorcerers forces a young village healer to face her greatest challenge: Can Khamsin accept the truth of who she is?

THE HUNTRESS
Barbara Karmazin
www.liquidsilverbooks.com

Sonia and Rulagh fight chupacabras and forge a relationship that transcends species.

" a sizzling futuristic adventure story that kept me riveted to my PC "
--CataRomance Reviews

NIGHTWALKERS
Kirstin South
www.extasybooks.com

When Jacqueline Talbot first saw darkly handsome Conor Montrose she said she would give up anything to have him. Little did she know then that she would have give up everything ...even her identity.

DESTINY'S SEDUCTION
Isabo Kelly
www.ltdbooks.com

To heal a magical rift that threatens time, a woman of prophecy and her first protector will be forced to face their destiny.

"A very fine fantasy novel ... that totally engages the reader!" --The Best Reviews

FORCED MATE
Rowena Beaumont Cherry
www.novelbooksinc.com

She thought she'd recited an alien poem, not wedding vows! She's either married her greatest enemy or started an intergalactic war...

ALL OUR TOMORROWS
Eden Robins
www.edenrobins.com

A prince turned assassin. An earth woman, his target. Neither counted on the pull of the alien *Rov Hum* ritual. Now they must make a life or death choice: duty or love?

Visit our author and publisher websites for chapter excerpts and more!

Join the Adventure!

in paperback & ebook at Amazon, Fictionwise or your local bookstore

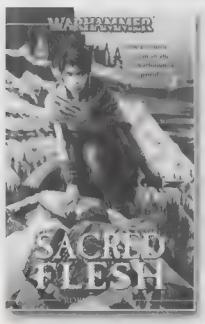
fashion. Such novelties as a detachable skirt, pulets (shoes with very long toes), and removable sleeves that were fastened to a dress with pins appeared. Another interesting fashion phenomenon was the appearance of angles on belts, hoods, purses, and shoes. When noble people walked in the street, they made their presence known with the tinkling of bells. (It's also interesting to note that buffoons had angles on their clothes, too.) Belts were worn on the underdress with openings on the overdress so the woman could take out her purse, rosary, or keys, which were hanging on the belt. The Church referred to these openings as "hellish windows" and accused the aristocracy of shamelessness and extravagance.

The 15th century brought a new look at a lady's beauty. The ideal was the 15- or 16-year-old young girl with fair, almost colorless hair and such pale skin that she looked seriously ill. In contrast to the pale, young girl, a woman who carried a child under her heart was also a symbol of beauty. Very high hats on leather frames were popular at this time and women began to wear shoes with thick soles to appear taller.

In the 16th century (the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance) corsets made from whalebone appeared. Clothes became so tight and firm that it was difficult, if not impossible, to not only eat or dance, but even to sit down in them.

There was a great difference between clothes of nobles and peasants. The clothes of a noble lady were luxurious with adornment: jewelry, and floor-length skirts. Peasant women wore dresses with skirts above the ankles. A noblewoman couldn't go anywhere without an entourage so as not to compromise her reputation, whereas a cutty could walk the streets alone and flirt with men. Her green sleeves advertised her profession (a popular medieval song, "Green Sleeves," was written about the prostitutes). Also the sky was the limit in clothes and adornments for landsknechts, warrior mercenaries who had no fear of death (their lives tended to be cut short), and were inspired after a campaign to wear their pillage without any restriction.

Along with tournaments, battles, and fashion shows, the White Castle festival program includes concerts of medieval music, dancing, and archery competitions. Professional stuntmen perform tricks with fire and fighting, while the members of the knights' clubs broadcast theatrical shows. You can observe an accolade (the ordination of knights) or witness the lady who folds her knight in her arms with relief after the battle. Also, you can take a little money for medieval beggars who appear in the crowd and laugh while watching a quarrel among buffoons. You can absorb a knowledge of history and get a feel for the spirit of the Middle Ages. You realize that, after centuries, knighthood is not forgotten, and even today a man who is honest, noble, and generous can be given the title of "Knight."



SACRED FLESH

Acclaimed author Robin D Laws is on top of his game in this gritty murder mystery that mixes the dark fantasy of the Warhammer world with edge-of your-seat action!

1-84416-091-2 • $7.99

'Superior dark fantasy from the grim world of Warhammer.'
– LOCUS

BUY IT NOW!
Available from all better bookstores!

www.blacklibrary.com

READ TILL YOU BLEED

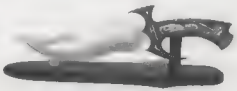
EconomySwords.com

THE CUTTING EDGE OF SAVINGS 1-800-730-5464

Red Ninja Sword

The Ninja Sword, unlike a katana, has a straight blade. This sword measures 36" and features a carbon-steel blade. The hilt and scabbard are wrapped in a matching pattern of black and red. The pommel and guard are brass and the sword is decorated with a red tassel. Comes with scabbard. Weight: 2.74 lbs. Blade length: 26", overall length: 36"

ESW-60002 only **$24.95**



King Arthur Sword

Excalibur, the sword of King Arthur, is wrapped in myth and legend. Now you can own this beautiful 37" sword with scabbard at an amazing price! Weight: 3.24 lbs. Blade length: 29", overall length: 37"

ESW-10001
only **$34.95**

Light Noble's Sword

This sword has a wooden grip. It is constructed with a brass pommel and hilt. It also comes with a custom-fitted sheath. Weight: 2.74 lbs. Blade length 24", overall length: 32".

ESW-10006
only **$29.95**

Fantasy Bowie Knife

This Bowie Knife has a super-sleek, futuristic look, but has an elven feel. The shape of the blade hints at flames and there is a flame design deeply etched into both sides of the blade. The handle is made of cast pewter & the blade is stainless steel.

ESW-20001 only **$24.95**

Visit EconomySwords.com today!

Alien Attle Weapon

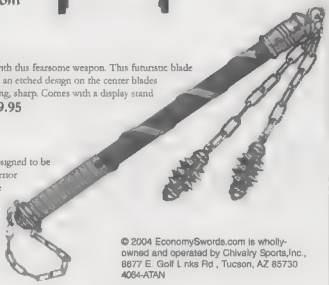
Take control of the battlefield with this fearsome weapon. This futuristic blade has four wrapped handgrips and an etched design on the center blades. Heavy steel construction; 44" long, sharp. Comes with a display stand.

ESW-40001 only **$49.95**

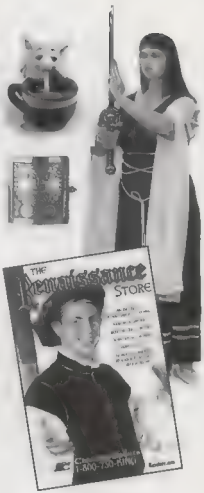
Double-Headed Flail

The flail is a weapon that was designed to be used from horseback. As the warrior charged toward his opponent, he would swing the flail and strike his opponent as he passed. Overall length: 27", weight: 1 lb 11 oz.

WAC-40003ES
only **$29.95**



© 2004 EconomySwords.com is wholly-owned and operated by Chivalry Sports,Inc., 8877 E. Golf Links Rd., Tucson, AZ 85730
4054-ATAN



NEWEST CATALOG from The Renaissance Store delivers easy care designs for reenactors.

Chivalry Sports, Inc. publishes The Renaissance Store Catalog and hosts its website at Renstore.com. They also operate EconomySwords.com where they sell a variety of blades at very low prices.

Chivalry Sports was founded 1991 by Gael and Jake Stitler, avid reenactors themselves and members of the SCA.

Renstore.com runs sales twice a month with discounts as low as 70% off the regular price. You can sign up to get email notification alerts whenever a new sale is starting. There are also free monthly sweepstakes for swords and other gifts. Anyone can enter and no purchase is required.

With hundreds (perhaps thousands) of products Renstore.com may be the largest online catalog for historical reenactment.

You can contact Chivalry Sports by phone 800-730-5464 to order a catalog or view the website at http://renstore.com.

Advertisement

The Angel's Daughter

By Jay Lake • Illustration by Maral Agnerian

Listen, everyone understands that an angel's merest flingernail paring is more beautiful than the fairest princess. Even the camels know that the hairs caught in an angel's brush are more lovely than all the Queens of Air and Darkness. Imagine then how exquisite the angel's daughter was, born of that holy beauty to live upon this earth. If you can imagine it, so could every prince and satrap from here to Samarkand and back again.

Far away in the Western Desert, hidden among the high crests of the Dune Sea, there lies a city encircled by an alabaster wall. That wall goes down to bedrock, and rises high to the sky, so smooth not even a fly could land upon it. There is only one gate in the wall—so small that a grown man must bend nearly double to pass through it—of ebony wood secured with a great, golden lock. Inside the city there is a palace of crystal towers. In the tallest tower there lives the angel's daughter. Hidden deep inside her heart is the golden key to the lock. The prophets have declared the man who could pass the gate would have her heart, and the man who had her heart could pass the gate.

Sometimes the simplest things can undo the most complex locks.

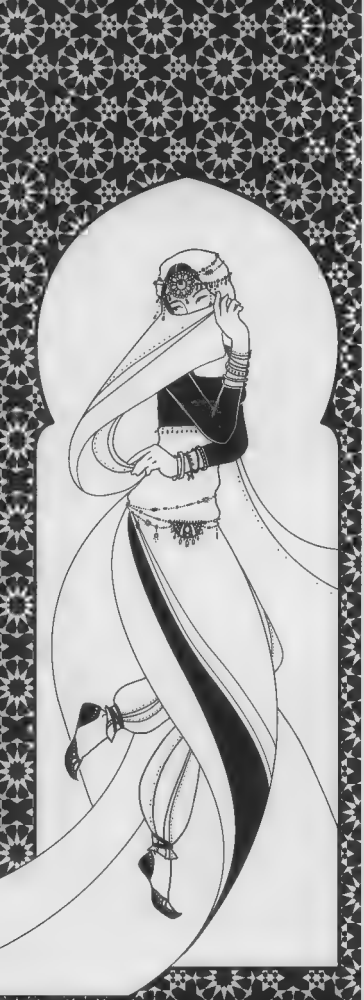
Suitors both great and powerful came to the alabaster city. They marched with armies and flew on the backs of rocs. Their elephants carried teak battering rams, their soldiers drove gangs of condemned prisoners to build high ramps of sand and stone.

But the prophecies are not so easily cheated. The elephants died of thirst, and the prisoners revolted. Teak split in the heat and the rocs came down with bird mites the size of badgers. Armies wandered under the brassy sun until the sands swallowed them up.

Clever men brought thieves, but the walls were too smooth to climb. Determined men brought miners, but the walls were too deep to delve. Wise men brought kites, but the walls were too high to overfly. One crafty prince even brought bundles of reeds on the backs of a thousand porters, intending to join them with linen rags infused with gum arabic. It was his plan to pipe in water from the distant sea and make the desert around the City of the Angel's Daughter a sparkling lake, and sail onward to capture her heart. Sadly, he drowned in a rain barrel upon the back of one of his camels—the only man to die so in a desert—and his porters were eaten by lions.

One lad alone from that caravan righteously observed the daily prayers of Fajr, Maghrib, and Isha, even while being stalked. The great cats of the desert spared the lad because of his piety, and he finally reached the alabaster city with a bundle of reeds on his back and a goatskin of wine at his belt. He had seven figs and a date in his wallet, and some of his wits about him. He was small, so the gate seemed of a size to him.

He was poor, and thus was used to making do. His only ambitions were to live another day and be free of foolish, prideful princes. He had achieved the latter ambition, apparently at the expense of the former.



The resourceful lad knelt at the little gate and peered through the keyhole in the golden lock. Inside the city he saw the crystal towers, small clouds of dust dancing before them. As he stared, the angel's daughter chanced to pass higher up in the towers, casting her shadow within his sight. The lad was struck dumb with the beauty of her mere silhouette on the sand. With the practicality of the poor, he also reasoned that such an exquisite creature living here in the desert must have food and water and shelter, which he might share after making a guest offering of his mite of food and wine. Many men had tried to pass the gate, but had any man first touched her heart?

The lad took the narrow reeds from his bundle, and fitted them together with some of the late prince's gum-infused linen rags. He built a long, thin pipe of the reeds, which he carefully pushed through the golden keyhole until the first reed came to rest against the crystal tower.

Now the keyhole was shaped like a harem door, with a rounded head that the reed slipped through and a narrow slot beneath. The lad bent the reed upward, met it with his lips, and tilted his head so that with one eye he might peer through the little slot below.

He thought for a while, then began to sing. It was a simple song, beloved by his people on their stony hilltops overlooking a shallow sea. He and his sisters had sung it to their goats of the mornings. The song had no words, just sweet syllables that recalled the rising of the sun and the waking of the birds and the day's first sip of cool water. The tower began to hum in time with his song, as fine bowls will chime together on the shelf when the earth shakes. Keeping the reed pipe pressed against the crystal tower, the lad sang his song until the glass palace was filled with it, and the song multiplied a thousand-fold to echo across the Dune Sea.

And the beloved shadow again passed before his eye, which he kept trained on the keyhole slot below his reed pipe. The lad then changed his tune, singing instead a love song of his people of assignations among the olive groves and gods like bulls chasing swan maidens, and the sweet dew of a lover's kiss. The beloved shadow withdrew at the new music, but soon came back, and seemed closer, stronger, waiting, hanging on his words.

The lad changed his tune yet again, a funeral hymn that recalled the joy of living, the honeyed wine of marriage, children growing like barley in the field, and a life of sunsets shared hand-in-hand. The reed pressed hard against the crystal tower, and the Dune Sea echoed with memories of a life not yet lived. Until the angel's daughter came to the ebon gate, reached inside her heart, and withdrew the key.

I would like to say they lived happily forever, but who am I to know such things? Truth be told, blinding beauty can be a curse, and a clever lad might grow to be a frustrated man. But if angels can shed their feathers, perhaps an angel's daughter can step out of her beauty's shadow like a dropped cloak and walk hand-in-hand through life with her lover. With her heavenly advice, a clever lad might prosper in the shipping trade, selecting only the purest spices and the finest silks.

Sometimes, if you walk south from our little port city into the first shifting sands of the Western Desert and listen on a quiet evening, those crystal towers still echo with music. And if the wind were to blow you a bundle of reeds, or a mangy roc feather, what could you do but smile and wish the lovers well? And that is the truth.

If you don't believe me, go ask your mother why she has no shadow.

THE SMELL OF MAGIC
LOVE may smell sweet
and BETRAYAL
bitter, but REVENGE
has the richest scent of all

THERE WERE PLENTY OF PEOPLE I RECOGNIZED IN the crowd, but as many that I didn't. That showed how much the village had changed and grown since I had left: many people were moving away from the borders now. A group of youngsters I had gone to school with cheered me on. I raised my hat to them and laughed as they all bowed in unison.

I saw Alarn among them and waved to him. He half-raised his hand and then slipped away through the crowd.

Among the cheering crowd there stood small groups of silent, solemn men and women. They held tightly onto their children and looked away as I met their gaze. These were the parents of the Revealing candidates. I could almost smell their fear above the scents of excitement and sweat that rose from the throng.

Everywhere I looked, I kept hoping to glimpse the golden-haired figure I remembered waving to me as I had left. I was impatient, even though I knew that I would see her at the Revealing. Shara was two years younger than me and it was now her turn to stand in front of the whole village and be declared an adult and free from taints.

"Kelde!" A voice cried out from the crowd. I turned, hoping to see Shara, but it was my mother, looking older, her hair grayer, her face more lined than I remembered. "You will come and see us?" she called out. I nodded and shouted back. "After I've finished at the inn." She waved to show she had understood and then disappeared into the crowd.

The crowd thinned as we reached the village green and the inn on its edge. Bunting hung all along the edge of the building, even the burned tree that dominated the green had been decorated with flowers. I stared at the tree, remembering the day it had been burned. It was the day I had lost my father, as one of the creatures was Revealed and attacked those around it, killing my father and two others before it was brought to the ground. I half thought I could still smell the sweet, sickly scent of burning flesh.

I stopped the horse and a stable boy ran out to tend to him. I dropped the reins onto the cart with a grateful sigh and stretched. It had been a long two days since we left the last village.

I helped Menan unload the cart and carried his bags into the inn, waving to Alles, the innkeeper, as I carried the large leather bag and its precious cargo of bottles up to the top floor.

Menan settled himself down on the bed in the room and motioned to me to pull off his long heavy boots. I held them firmly and heaved, the warm smell of leather mixing with the dry scent of road dust and the strong, stale smell of Menan's sweat.

"Off with you and see your family," he said. "We won't be needed until tomorrow." He settled back on the bed with a grateful sigh.

"Thank you, sir." I hurried down the stairs and out into the courtyard. I slipped into the stables to check that the horses had been fed and watered. Once I was satisfied, I walked down the familiar lanes to my parents' house.

"Kelde!" My mother stood at the door of the house, her arms white from breadmaking. I hugged her and smelled the familiar smells of flour and soap, the gentle hint of beeswax polish, and the medley of other subtler scents that made up my mother. It felt good to be home, even if just for a short time.

My mother took a step back and looked me up and down.

"I'd swear you've grown," she said. "Your father would have been so proud!" I thought of the giant of a man that I dimly remembered from childhood. "Come in, come in."

Kal, our old sheepdog, stirred from the fireplace when I entered the kitchen and I knelt by her side and let her sniff my hand. I ran a hand through her fur and then buried my face into the hair, taking in the smells of my childhood.

I sat at the old oak table, using my finger to trace the marks I had made as a child.

My mother carried on kneading the dough and we talked for a while about the places I had been and the things I had seen.

At a lull in the conversation, I looked up and asked.

"Have you seen Shara?"

My mother smiled and wiped her hands on her apron. Flour drifted in white clouds, catching the sunlight as it settled on the table. I carefully put my handkerchief to my nose to avoid inhaling it.

"I wondered how long you'd take to ask that," she said. "Her family is still in the village, and I see her around. She has grown in the last two years. She'll have a lot of suitors after the Revealing."

"I think I might go for a walk," I said. I stood and pecked her on the cheek. She laughed.

"Don't forget, it's left at the end of the road to get to Shara's."

I felt my cheeks flush and laughed.

THE WALK TO SHARA'S PARENTS' WAS A PLEASANT stroll through the lanes I had followed as a child. The birds sang, and I was home—for once I felt content with the world.

A figure hurried down the lane toward me and I called out for him to stop. "Alarn!"

He stopped and turned.

"Kelde." He smiled awkwardly.

"How are you?" I asked, reaching out to grasp his hand. He smelled of sweat and dust, and a slight scent of fear. "You've no need to be nervous around me, your Revealing's long over!" I said. I smiled and clapped him on the shoulder, trying to bring out the old Alarn I remembered.

"I know." He laughed awkwardly and looked at his boots. "It's great seeing you, Kelde, but I have to get back home."

"See you later?" I asked. He nodded and hurried away. As I watched his retreating figure, I thought about how much I had given up by becoming Menan's apprentice. Even my old friends were nervous around me now.

As I walked up the track to the farm, I saw a slim, blonde-haired figure walk between the house and the barn, carrying a pair of pails. Shara! I followed her into the barn.

The sweet smells of cut hay and the sharp sting of cow dung mingled with the comforting damp smell of the old wood. I walked slowly and quietly along the edge of the barn, keeping away from the light.

Shara sat with her back to me, on a low stool while the cow she milked stood patiently, slowly chewing its cud. I stood for a moment and watched her, listening to the thud, thud pattern as the milk struck the bucket.

"I've been expecting you," Shara said, without turning.

"I've obviously lost the knack of surprising you," I said, suddenly nervous. "You'd never have heard me as a child."

Shara stopped milking and faced me. She flicked back a stray hair and smiled, lighting up the face I had remembered in my dreams for the last two years.

I had heard you were back," she said. "It's good to see you."

I walked over and kissed her on the cheek. She tasted of rouge and sweat and a strong perfume that made me want to choke. Fashions had obviously changed among the girls in the village and Shara now followed them. But then, she was almost of an age to consider suitors. I wondered for a moment if the perfume had something, but could detect nothing beneath it.

We stood slightly apart, as children we would have hugged, but now there was an awkwardness.

"Will you be at the fair tonight?" I asked.

"I will be."

"With anyone?" I forced myself to ask, fearing the answer. Could I bear it if Shara had found another person?

Shara laughed and stood on tiptoe to kiss the end of my nose. "No stupid, I've been waiting for you."

WILL I DO?" SHARA'S VOICE CAME FROM BEHIND me. I turned from where I had been talking to the stable boy and stopped, my mouth open. She was dressed in a long, green dress. Her hair flowed in golden waves onto her bare shoulders. Two years had transformed her into a woman.

I stepped toward her and kissed her quickly on the lips. There was a slightly different smell to her perfume since the morning, a darker, tangier taste that lurked beneath the surface of cloying, succulent scent

"You will do very well," I said

She looked me up and down and straightened my jacket "And I suppose you'll have to do as well."

I laughed and put on my hat as we left the courtyard

The village green had been transformed Hawker stalls filled the edges, selling hot pies and trinkets The cries of the hawkers mingled with the screams of the children that ran between them

Shara and I walked together, arm in arm, through the crowds I was so happy that I wanted to bottle the scents of that night. Years later I would open the stopper and smell the food; the night air and bonfire smoke mixed with Shara's perfume and remember the evening as if it were yesterday

A group of teenagers, dressed in their best tunics and dresses, ran in front of us, laughing and screaming. They stopped when they saw me, a look of fear passing across their faces I smiled at them, but they simply turned and walked slowly away

I sighed They should enjoy their last day as children. Not worry about what the Revealing might bring

"Does *that* bother you?" Shara asked She had seen the reaction of the other Revealing candidates

"A little." I admitted

"Is it difficult to do?" Shara asked. She turned to me. "When you find one?"

"Kill, you mean?" I said

She nodded, biting her lip

"No, not now." It had been hard at first, after the first one I had cried for a day at what I had done Now I just thought of them as creatures and nothing more "It becomes easier."

Shara looked at me and then seized my hand

"Follow me," she said and led me away towards the inn We entered the courtyard and Shara looked around

"Come on," she said again

I let Shara pull me into the barn, the smell of hay obscuring the scents outside She turned in the half-light and I pulled her close to me, sliding my hands behind her back She pressed against me and we kissed

I was lost, breathing in her scent as we kissed and kissed again

She pulled back from me and smiled, taking my hand I realized that something was wrong. Shara's perfume smelt wrong As I kissed her I became aware of the scents it masked

Shara tugged my hand to lead me to the back of the barn. I resisted unable to clear that hidden scent from my mind Where had I smelled it before?

"What's wrong?" she asked. "I thought you still loved me?"

"I do, I just—I can't!" I said and released her hand

She looked at me with worry in her eyes

"You do still love me?"

"Yes." And I did. I still loved her, despite everything. Despite the scent that clung to her like a second skin. "I will see you tomorrow

I left Shara and went back onto the green. I wandered through the crowds and drank hot punch until I could no longer see the Blasted Tree or smell Shara's perfume. Then I went back to the inn

I knocked on Menan's room and entered He looked up from his bed

"Been celebrating?" he asked

I nodded "Can I conduct the tests tomorrow?" I asked "It would mean a lot to me."

Menan laughed "Want to look good in front of your friends?" He frowned. "It's not usually allowed."

"But an exception could be made?"

"All right, I think you're good enough now."

Thank you," I said and closed the door I went to bed with the memory of Shara's kiss still on my lips and that scent lingering in my nose

THE NEXT DAY WAS BRIGHT AND CLEAR A SLIGHT breeze stirred the trees and brought the smells of pine sap and beech to my window

I rose late, blurry-eyed and hung over from the night before I breakfasted on the usual mix of fruits, refusing the cheese that the innkeeper pressed on me. I didn't want anything to affect my nose that day

The ceremony started at noon and I joined Menan on the village green. The scenes of gaiety and abandon of the previous evening had been cleared away. Instead, the villagers surrounded the green in a quiet crowd, whilst the teenagers taking part in the Revealing stood in two lines facing each other the boys on the left and the girls on the right

Menan stood at the end of the line, dressed in his full ceremonial uniform. I had spent the time after breakfast polishing his boots and hat buckle so they gleamed

He raised his head and spoke in a voice that rang out across the crowd

"We are gathered here for the Revealing, to bring these children into adulthood and to reveal any of the monsters that may lurk in our midst—"

I tuned out the familiar words and thought about the Revealings I had seen here- from my own two years previously to when I was six years old and my father died

His speech finished, Menan motioned to me and I started my walk down the line

I stopped at the first girl and blew my nose on my handkerchief She looked up at me and then back at the ground She clenched her hands into fists and her whole body shook

I took a deep breath, drawing in her scent, letting the mix of sweat and fear mingle.

"Clean," I said. The girl looked up at me with relief, tears welling in her eyes. I remembered the same feeling of fear from my Revealing. That somehow, I was tainted even though I didn't know it

I moved across to the line of boys and even before I reached him, the first boy broke away from the line and ran across the village green toward the river

Continued on page 98

{ I TOOK A DEEP BREATH, DRAWING IN HER SCENT, LETTING THE MIX OF SWEAT AND FEAR MINGLE. }

THE WATER CASTLE

BY JAY LAKE

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT GRIMANDO

When Arcadia was thirteen, her father gave her the egg.

"Daughter," he whispered. Papa was curled into a cleft of the rocks, breathing harder than a lathered horse. His green eyes were wild and bloody, pale hair plastered to his forehead like albino seaweed. His breath reeked of harsh, coppery pain.

She tugged at his hand. "Papa, come on. The tide is rising."

Even now the eager fingers of the sea chuckled around Arcadia's ankles, tickling cold. The cliffs towering above them offered no shelter but height. At the moment, height was all they needed.

Papa didn't answer. Instead he dug shivering fingers past the lacings of his undertunic. The embroidered scholar's brocade he normally wore was days gone, cast into a ditch at the start of the Burnings. "Here, girl," he said, his red gaze wandering. His left hand reached out to hers.

"I'm here, Papa," she whispered. "We've got to move. We must get higher up." Mama Helen had not walked out of the fires with them, back in Moreston when the city burned.

Arcadia balled those memories away. It was up to her to keep Papa alive now.

"No," he said, his voice suddenly firm again. He sounded almost like the old Papa, before the fires and everything. Before the Pleasant People had disappeared and the Poison People had come to slay the world.

Almost, but not quite.

The tide, ever impatient, slopped at her calves, carrying the rotten smell of seaweed with it. Salt tickled her nose. She saw Papa's shins were getting wet where the water burbled up to his rocky perch.

"The tide won't listen to 'no,'" Arcadia finally said, desperate. Papa's right hand jerked from his tunic, popping free like a clam from a shell, before shoving something small at her. She took it.

It was an egg, or perhaps an egg-shaped stone. Small as a bantam hen might lay, sapphire blue, with swirls in it like lamp-worked glass. The egg was covered with a bit of slime, as if it were a bezoar fresh from a boar's gut. Arcadia hefted it. Heavy, but not as heavy as Mama's jewelry had been.

Glass, then, she thought, immediately ashamed that she should worry about value. Even before the Burnings, Papa could plumb the mysteries of the stars and sea, and yet never make a decent boiled egg. Now with Mama lost and Papa like this, someone had to worry about things like money and the cold tide.

As if to remark upon her fears, another wave splashed water all the way up to her waist, soaking Papa's knees where he had them drawn up to his chest.

"It's very pretty, Papa," Arcadia said, "and now you must come out of there."

"No, daughter. I am done." He wept, tears mingling with the water lapping at his legs, until a cough wracked him. Wiping blood on his undertunic, he tried to smile. "Hold that close, and when the time comes, cast it into the water. You will know."

"I will know what, Papa?"

But he didn't answer.

As the water rose, she scrambled past him, to his shoulders, tugging Papa's collar, then his hair, to keep his face above the advancing tide. Though he still breathed, his head drooped and bobbed like a broken doll's, and he did nothing to fight the water.

Arcadia pulled until Papa's hair came off in bloody hanks in her hands, but she could not save him from the tide. The water sucked his life away, taking her heart with it. She finally climbed a little higher, clutching the egg in one hand and the sodden clumps of hair in the other, to cry as she hadn't since the Poison People first came to steal away everything she knew.

When She Was Fifteen, Arcadia Helped to Kill a Woman

The cities were empty now, burned shells of buildings inhabited only by animals and people worse than animals. Arcadia wandered the Corn Coast, traipsing through fields already rich with optimistic saplings racing toward the sky, the last corn harvest long fallen to mulch and picked clean by the countless crows.

Sometimes a little fishing village still held people, wary and vicious, but she was a stranger everywhere. Sometimes a ship stood off to sea, for folk believed that the Poison People had a horror of water and that it was safer to live under the lash and blade of raiding pirates than to haunt the shores.

Arcadia was never alone, for the world was full of Strangers now, most as lost as she.

She stole into the market square of an empty town unremarkable save for a stone arched bridge that crossed a medium-sized river. It was either the Conant or the Bright, she thought, but geography had slipped away from Arcadia like most of her other studies.

The sun still set over the ocean. That was good enough for her.

A number of other wanderers were present, Strangers selling one another the last few nails pulled from some burned steading, or a bent plow, or half a sack of moldy acorns. It was a mockery of the rich market of Moreston, which she had once thought so mean.

"Yer'd fetch a good price down coast, I reckon," whispered a thin, greasy man with skin like leather and breath of a dog. He stood in the shadows of a livery stable wall, the roof long fallen in.

"I reckon," said Arcadia. "Don't want to be sold, though." She kept a hand on her knife, a small thing not much longer than her forearm, but sharp enough to serve if she screamed for help. Which she'd probably even get, at least here at the market.

There was little violence among the Strangers: those without homes who still survived. Angry townsmen, pirates, Poison People, bandit gangs out of the tangled forests of the mountainous east all preyed on the Strangers, but among themselves, they were almost gentle. A democracy of fear: respect for the few survivors.

A parti-toothed grin split his lips. "I'd halve the take with yer, lass."

"And I'd have nothing," she said, hand leaving her knife.

"What yer got now?" he asked, stepping out of the shadows. Together they walked through the market.

"A knife, myself, and a dozen ears of wild corn from a fallow field." Arcadia hefted a sack lashed to her belt.

"I'll gi' yer three strips er dried mutton and a physick against the Poisons fer halve yer corn."

Don't need no physick," said Arcadia. Those folk medicines were just trash anyway, comfort for the desperate. She hadn't eaten meat in months. Not strong or fast enough to hunt, she had to trade or beg for it. Fish she could catch, but a lingering stain of Goddess-faith kept Arcadia away from Her cold, sacred children.

"Two ears for the mutton."

"Three," he said. "Yer sure about the physick? There's Poison People hereabouts."

Arcadia sighed. "Physick don't work. It's just dog bile and herbs. Makes you sick, not keeps you safe." *Logic*, she thought. No one ever understood simple logic. But Papa had taught her well.

Hanging cold between her breasts in a cradle woven of Papa's hair, the egg seemed to weep at the thought of him. She fought back a shudder.

"Maybe so and maybe ain't," said the greasy man. "But I don't want 'em catching me."

The Pleasant People had been small, lightly furred, with open faces and bright golden eyes. Once, they were everywhere, cooking for people, cleaning their homes, tending their crops and children. All but the poorest lived in comfort, and most folk had a dozen of the Pleasant People working in their homes and gardens.

Until the Burnings, two years ago. And the coming of the Poison People.

Papa had begun to develop theories before he died, and in the two lonely years since, Arcadia had found ample time to think.

The Pleasant People had attended almost every birth for generations. They'd always taken the afterbirth away when they cleaned the mother and child with their gentle, furry hands. Somehow the Pleasant People had used the afterbirth to conjure or create twins, doubles of many of the people in the world. The Poison People, who walked the streets and forest paths, pretending to be ordinary folk, until one went into a berserk rage, or another slashed the throats of children.

Or a Poison Person met his or her human double.

Arcadia had yet to meet hers, but she figured on that happening someday.

The greasy man laid a hand on her arm, stopping Arcadia's walking pace. They were in the center of the market, in front of the wooden platform where the Pleasant People had once been shown for sale or trade between households. A few stalls were scattered about, selling scavenged goods or even some new work, such as the little half-melted pots whose maker awaited someone with a greater knowledge of kilns and glazes.

A small crowd of Strangers had gathered on the broken, muddy cobbles before the platform. In front of them, her back to the chest-high beams, a woman with frizzled black hair and wide green eyes stood, her arms thrown open screaming at two other women.

"I'm her, I tell you! Not some fiend from the forest! Maizie Doucet, widow of the town assessor."

"I seen Maizie three days back in the camp at Ponder's Falls," shouted one of the accusers, turning to face the crowd. She was ruddy with anger, brown hair flying wild in the breeze off the sea. "Ain't no one passed me on the trail here. This can't be her."

"That's my twin," Maizie sobbed. "My sister, Margery. She always lived upcountry, since she ran off with that Spicer boy to the timber camps long before the Burnings."

"Ain't no good come of being twins," said the other accuser. She was as big as Maizie and the woman from Ponder's Falls put together. "That's just cover for a Poison Person what's befriended their double."

The crowd didn't like this, axe handles slapping palms as knives rattled from sheaths. The democracy of fear was taking a vote.

"Wait a moment," Arcadia shouted, surprising herself.

The greasy man tugged her arm. "Don't yer do this," he hissed. "They'll get yer next. The fat one's Armiga the old miller's wife. She's been crazy since afore Goddess drew the stars in the sky. People hereabouts think she's got the Sight."

Arcadia shook his arm off as the crowd turned to look at her. "All the more reason for me to try," she muttered. Then, louder, "Don't you know there's only one way to tell if someone's Poison?"

"Cut off their 'ead," shouted Armiga's friend, the woman from Ponder's Falls.

"Or cut it open." Arcadia stalked through the crowd, drawing her knife again. She shoved past Armiga and the woman from Ponder's Falls, walked right up to Maizie. "You want to live?" Arcadia whispered urgently.

"Yes. . ." Maizie's eyes darted back and forth, her breath rattling just like Papa's had the day he died.

Arcadia grabbed the other woman's jaw. "Then you have to go along with what I do. Otherwise these people are going to kill you." She turned to face the crowd.

Staring right back at Arcadia, Armiga had her fists on her hips, breathing as hard as Maizie. Arcadia realized she hadn't seen a fat person since the Burnings. The woman from Ponder's Falls was trying to squirm into the crowd, fade away from the bloody business, but fists and knives pushed her back into the clear space by the platform.

"Someone shave her head," Arcadia said, pointing at Maizie, "and I'll need four men to help me." One for each arm and leg. Maizie would fight. "And hot water, if anyone's got a fire, along with a torch."

Promised a better show than a simple lynching, the crowd moved to comply.

Maizie whimpered and cursed, but let herself be seated on a stool and shaved with an eerie gentleness by an old man and a small boy who never spoke to her or each other, yet worked with near-perfect coordination.

The greasy man stepped up to touch Arcadia's elbow.

"THE ORACLE HAS ALSO PROPHESIED A WATER CASTLE TO RISE HERE IN THE NORTH. SOMEWHERE ON THE CORN COAST, THAT WILL SAVE US ALL FROM THE POISON PEOPLE. I HAVE BEEN SENT HERE TO FIND THE ONE WHO WOULD RAISE THAT CASTLE."

'Yer want I should keep Armiga's friend around?" he asked, nodding at the woman from Ponder's Falls.

Arcadia was about to tell him to let the other woman go, but she changed her mind. Something about Armiga's fatness bothered her. How could anyone be so large, here and now? "Yes, keep her close."

Then four men had Maizie spread out face-down on a table brought over from an empty market stall, her shorn head almost hanging off one end. Arcadia called for a bucket, which the barber's boy brought, still without a word.

Everyone stared, especially Maizie, straining her head around to see Arcadia.

"I was in the Stranger camp just outside the ruins of Port

Orford last winter," she said loudly. "A learned doctor showed me how to determine if someone is Poison." Well actually, he'd done the trephination where Arcadia could see him from a perch on a nearby rooftop. But she'd practiced on a dead dog later. "We will look for the worms inside her head. If we find them, Maizie is Poison, and the real Maizie is at Ponder's Falls. If we do not find them, well."

She stared at Armiga so long that the entire crowd focused on Maizie's accuser. The fat woman stood her ground, but for the first time looked uncomfortable.

What in the name of the Goddess was she doing? Arcadia asked herself. Was this better than watching Maizie be stoned to death, or have her head split open?

It was, for Maizie.

Arcadia plunged her knife in a bucket of heated water, then held the blade in the flame of a pitch torch for a moment. This Papa had taught her, when they were studying the inner mysteries of animals together. She laid the palm of her left hand firmly on Maizie's stubbled scalp, then nodded at the four men holding the woman. They bore down.

The tip of the knife broke skin much more easily than Arcadia had imagined.

The dog's head had been tough as gristle. Maizie squirmed and tried to shriek, but the barber's boy jammed a stick between her jaws, then clamped them shut with his hands.

Carefully, Arcadia cut a triangular flap of skin, leaving the base attached.

Blood oozed but did not spurt. She peeled the flap back, fighting a sticky, stretchy feeling as the crowd closed around her, breathing hard, a great, winded beast with dozens of legs.

Slick fat covered the bone, like the film on the egg when Papa had given it to her. Arcadia cocked her head one way, then the other, studying the shiny, pulpy surface. She laid the tip of her knife against the bone, just within the triangular wound.

"She made me do it!" shrieked the woman from Ponder's Falls. The sudden outburst caused Arcadia to slip, the knife splitting open one side of the careful incision in the skin.

Arcadia spun, bloody knife in her hands. The greasy man held the squirming woman. Maizie's accuser. "Armiga made me do it, promised me bread and gold, and ... and ..." She began to cry.

"What?" demanded Arcadia, anger rising in her like the tide that had claimed Papa's life. "What did she promise you?"

"Meat," the woman sobbed, stealing glances at Maizie's ragged scalp. "She promised me meat. A quarter share of whatever the woman had, and meat. I never been to Ponder's Falls in my life."

Then Armiga tried to run.

Arcadia couldn't stop the beating that ensued. The greasy man grabbed Arcadia, held her back, as Armiga was stomped to death. When the fat woman's head broke open, pale pink worms wiggled out, streaming across the shattered cobbles, squeaking in voices almost too high to hear.

The greasy man released Arcadia as the two of them joined in the hunt for the worms. Poison must be killed, smashed, burned.

When it was over, Maizie stood next to Arcadia, breathing hard, her own feet muddy and pulpy from the worm hunt. Arcadia looked around, saw the woman who wasn't from Ponder's Falls lying against the platform, her head bent over at an impossible angle for the neck.

"Someone got her the way they were going to get me," said Maizie.

Arcadia felt ill, almost as ill as she had the day Papa died. Though they'd found a Poison Person, the folk of the market had killed a woman, too. Arcadia's fault, through her anger. She had let this happen.

The dead woman was not innocent, but neither was she someone who should have died. There were so few people left. "Who was she?" Arcadia asked.

"New in town," muttered the greasy man. "Armiga must of got to her first."

"I'm done here," said Arcadia bitterly. "I just came for trade, not for blood."

"Wait," said Maizie. "Before you go ... finish me. I want proof."

"Finish you?" Arcadia asked stupidly.

"My head. Make them see there aren't any worms."

Arcadia first cut Maizie, then others demanding the same proof of their humanity, opening scalps and skulls until, well into the evening. She eventually used a little chisel and saw handed her by the barber's boy. It felt strange, strange as anything Arcadia had done since Papa died, but the proving made people happy. By the time she trudged off into the moonlight reeking of blood and sweat, Arcadia was loaded with more food and goods than she'd had since the Burnings.

The greasy man came with her, "just fer a ways," he said.

Rich for the first time since she'd been on her own, Arcadia was glad for the company.

When she was seventeen, Arcadia first heard rumor of the Water Castle.

Robert had not left her side since that day in the market. Arcadia was glad of him. He knew how to hunt, and fight, and live in the woods much better than she. Though Strangers remained both wary and somewhat kind, the more Arcadia traveled, the more bandits—and worse—she heard of, or saw, or sometimes even encountered.

He'd had her cut his head, too, a few weeks after they first met. Robert then kept his head shaved except for a thin tail of hair growing out of the center of his scalp, just above the scar. He braided the tail and wound it with cords of animal sinew until it seemed a bowstring that he might someday clip to his feet and draw upon himself.

Arcadia never asked anyone to cut her own head. No one ever thought to demand it of her.

They were back in Port Orford, staying in a little inn called Stoats and Tea in the Harborside Quarter, where walls of rubble blocked the streets in and out, and cutthroat sailors patrolled. It was almost like a normal town. Slowly, the cities were coming back.

Arcadia sat at the bar in the tavern room of the inn with Robert, drinking lime juice off some ship from the south. He kept a mug of ale in front of him, but barely touched it. Robert didn't like not being able to see trees and grass. Instead of the warm green of open country, Stoats and Tea reeked of bad chimneys and rotten yeast.

"There's some priest off the *Spent Shilling* been in here," said the barkeeper, words erupting from his meditative polishing of tankards. His name was Sherk, and he was big, leathery, and pale as anything that swam in the ocean. Since Arcadia had opened his head for him the year before, Sherk had kept his scalp shaved and had been tattooing around the scar some elaborate, swirling cosmology of his own devising, one needle stroke at a time with a mirror and lamp black.

"Hope he spent well," Arcadia said politely.

"Been asking after the barber girl what cuts people's heads."

She glanced pointedly at Sherk's own conspicuous scalp. "And ?"

"Tole him you was upcountry." Sherk seemed proud of his cunning. "Gone east, into the mountings."

Time was, Arcadia thought, *one of the Pleasant People would have poured the drinks and another would have rubbed her feet while Sherk sat by the fire and kept an eye on the room. Now even low cunning was stirred to life by a simple question.*

"Thank you, Sherk," she said with a glance at Robert. "Would you happen to know where the priest has gotten himself to?"

"Figger he's asking up and down the dock, on account of he called me a liar." Sherk grinned. "I piddled in his beer, though, so we's even."

"You did lie to him," Arcadia said gently, "but you did it for me, so that's OK. I think I'll let him find me." She slipped off her stool, gathered her embroidered cloak around her.

"This ain't smart," grumbled Robert.

Why would someone from the south be looking for me?" Arcadia asked. The sailors said the Poison People weren't nearly as bad in the south, that nobility and gentry and armies had survived the Burnings. Not like the Corn Coast, where there was no one in charge anymore.

"Can't be good."

She smiled. "You'll stand by me."

Together they stepped into the street. Stoats and Tea was right across from the wharves themselves, though only two of the piers were in use anymore. Two galleasses and a bireme lay at dock, along with some small fishing smacks and a sloop. *Spent Shilling* had to be one of the galleasses. Masses of rotting nets and broken crates littered the wharfside road, along with bulwarks of burned timber brought down from the slow rebuilding of the Harborside Quarter, while the eternal stink of tide flats hung over everything.

The usual mix of idlers was in the street, but all the locals nodded and gave way to Arcadia and Robert, which warned off most of the visiting sailors. The few who couldn't read the signals glared at her, or sized her up as a potential hooker, but Robert flipped an axe from hand to hand, which was sufficiently discouraging.

Arcadia glanced into the Clay Pot, a shebeen almost too squalid to bear the dignity of a name, but Skinny Slade the door ward just nodded at her.

Nothing to fear there.

She and Robert walked to the door of the Bear and Bones to the same lack of reaction. Stepping away to head farther north along the wharfside road, she spotted their quarry.

"That's him, isn't it?" Arcadia said to Robert. The egg felt cold against her chest, the ropes of her father's hair burning into her.

A man lurched toward them, tall as anyone she had ever seen, his legs strapped into steel greaves and leather like some half-dressed soldier. Above the greaves he wore a bloused tunic of blue, with yellow insets that might have been meant for stars though it was hard to tell as he walked.

His head was as bald as Sherk's, the scalp nubbly with little pocks that glinted. Arcadia realized this man had blue gemstones set into his skin, the ransom of a Lord Mayor cased in puckered scars.

And you," the newcomer said, "are the barber girl of the Corn Coast. Arcadia Saxon Umberger." His voice was mellow, almost weirdly normal given the lashed-together oddness of his appearance.

"Perhaps," said Arcadia. The egg was definitely cold. She'd always imagined it to heat and cool with her moods and sense of danger, but this was like winter ice crawling on her skin. "What of it?"

The Oracle of Blackwater sent me." That was a legendary oracle of the Goddess.

"You are no priestess of the green woods," Arcadia said, almost laughing at the thought.

"No." He stared down at her thoughtfully. "I am Stone Blue, a tertiary hierarch of the Star Temple in the White City, which you people call Chalkcliffs. In the matter of ordinary course the Star Temple does not offer honor to your little tree spirit."

Arcadia did laugh at that. "Goddess wove the world and everyone in it from roots in the soil before light ever touched down. Believe what you will. She is in the water and in the air and in your blood and bones."

Not that Arcadia really believed that either, particularly in this time of the Poison People, but she was raised to the Goddess and had yet to find reason to abandon Her completely. Especially in the face of mockery.

"Tree spirit or no," said Stone Blue, "some force has kept that old woman on her little Oracle's stool at Blackwater these last two centuries and more. We keep close watch and careful records in my order. Since the passing of the Pleasant People, she has complained of new cankers that sap her life away.

"The Oracle has also prophesied a Water Castle to rise here in the north, somewhere on the Corn Coast, that will save us all from the Poison People. I have been sent to find the one who would raise that castle."

"Then you know more than I, tertiary hierarch." Arcadia again glanced at Robert, who simply glared at the priest. "There is no Water Castle here, neither in rumor nor fact."

Although Papa *had* told her to cast the egg into the water. His last words had no sensible connection with this priest's errand. "You are welcome along the Corn Coast," she continued, "so long as you do not bring further troubles with you. We have a plentitude of those."

"Your kindness is as great as your reputation," Stone Blue said. "I will search further, and draw my own conclusions." He bowed, stately as a stork, and lumbered off.

That night a group of southern sailors attacked the Stoats and Tea. In driving them back, Sherk and Robert killed four with help from some of the local bravos, but at the cost of three of Sherk's fingers and one of Robert's ears. *Spent Shilling* was gone before the morning tide. Arcadia had the bodies set on a crude raft of the charred lumber, towed out to sea and burned.

WHEN SHE WAS NINETEEN, ARCADIA MET HER FATE.

The Poison People had recently reappeared in the same numbers that led to the original Burnings. Refugee Strangers fled deeper upcountry or clustered to the few functioning towns, including Port Orford. Rumors of the Water Castle ran wild, that a great host would come up the beaches riding horses of foaming tide to slay all the Poison People and set everything to rights again.

Even worse in Arcadia's view, her own Poison double was reported up and down the Corn Coast, leading an army of Poison People and turncoat humans.

Sherk traveled with her and Robert now, and a handful of others came and went as they could. Arcadia was never

alone anymore, not even in sleep, for someone with a cudgel or a sword always watched over her bed since Stone Blue had tried to steal her away in Port Orford

Arcadia and her party were camped on the landward slopes of a headland above the surf, somewhat south of Moreston and close to where Papa had died. She sat in the twisted limbs of a gnarled pine and watched the gray sea heave and grumble to itself far beneath her feet

What did Stone Blue want with me?" she asked the surf To fulfill the prophecy, or to deny it?"

Better ter ask what the old Oracle lady wanted," said Robert behind her "It was her that sent the blue priest

Perhaps " Arcadia gronned at him over her shoulder

Robert was as lean and greasy as ever, never had taken to her habits of bathing and dressing well, but he was her oldest companion left in the world. He carried her knives and bone saws, he fed her, protected her, was everything except friend or lover

What is it you want from me, Robert? Why have you followed me these .ast few years?

He hawked and spat across the wind, then stretched his arms to crack his knuckles, staring at his locked together hands Arcadia waited, patient as the tide, inhaling the scents of pine and salt and enjoying the sun on her shoulders In time Robert would give his answer

Early on, she'd been afraid to ask Later it hadn't seemed to matter Now, things were changing again She wanted to know the answer to a question she should have asked over Mazzie's bleeding scalp in the market long ago, before it was too late to ask at all.

IT SPUN, FLASHING IN THE MORNING SUN, TRAILING A FAINT SPUME OF HER FATHER'S HEART'S BLOOD, ARCING PAST THE SURF TO FALL TOWARD THE GRAY SWELLS FARTHER OUT FROM SHORE. IT WAS AS IF THE EGG WERE A SMALL, BLUE BIRD, TAKEN WINGLESS FLIGHT TO FLEE THE TYRANNY OF THE SHORE.

I still reckon yer'd fetch a good price down coast," he finally said

Arcadia's mouth dropped open, a shocked shout pushing its way up her throat before she realized that Robert was making a joke for the first time since she'd known him The shout found its way out as a garbled laugh, which brought tears, then coughing

I reckon I might," she finally gasped. "So that's what you've been after " Arcadia fought back a fit of giggling

Then there's the problem of the Poison People," he said "Yer the first I ever seen who tried to make things better for anyone but theyself That's why I followed ver out of the market And yer never stopped tryin'. That's why I'm still around Someone's got to set the world to rights, and I don't see no one else doin' it "

That was practically an oration, coming from Robert, but she *had* asked

Thank you," Arcadia finally said, then turned to study the surf before she cried for real

Someone shouted behind her. Arcadia ignored them, counting on Robert to listen, to respond, to care for her back She had become very occupied with watching the surf as the egg against her chest chilled again, even as her father's hair began to burn This hadn't happened since Stone Blue approached her

Was it him? She didn't want to look Was it time for the egg, as Papa had predicted? She didn't want to cast it away, her last link with her father

Ma'am " Robert laid his fingers on her shoulder. "Yer Poison double's marching down the valley along Big Fir Creek with a whole pile of Poison People and wrong-headed folk Word is the blue priest is with them " His fingers tightened "They're coming for yer, ma'am And the runners say there's Pleasant People in the march, too We ain't seen them since the Burnings "

She stroked his fingertips Papa had been right She would know when it was time This was it Almost

The egg was so cold it seemed to burn rather than freeze her skin. Only her nose knew better, smelling salt air and pine instead of the crinkling, crisp scent her skin felt as if it should be giving out

Later, when Sherk brought Arcadia a heavy wool blanket to keep her warm in the moonlight, he told her the Poison People were marching right through the night "They'll be here by dawn, ma'am," Sherk said. "There ain't near enough of us here to stop 'em, ma'am "

"Go back to Port Orford, Sherk " Arcadia said

"No ma'am. I won't." He retreated a dozen feet and sat in some bracken, hugging his knees and watching her. "Robert and I been talking You're helping the Corn Coast, not hurting. That's enough for us. We ain't leaving

She smiled "So you thought you'd stay here and say good bye?

"They're gonna kill you, ma'am. Us too, before they get to you There's a dozen or more boys here, we'll slow 'em down a while "

"I'm sleeping up here on the cliff top tonight," Arcadia told Sherk "Have everyone on the headland before dawn. before the Poison People come. We can meet them together "

"Never did want to die alone," Sherk said, now rocking himself in the bracken like a giant, tattooed baby

"You won't," Arcadia promised "I don't know when or how you'll die, but when that day comes, I'll hold your hand and close your eyes for you."

The big man's tears gleamed in the moonlight as Arcadia turned to stare at the white surf, looking for signs from Papa in the folding tumble below her clifftop perch

Morning brought a glare of salmon-colored light from the east, behind her, leaving the ocean's sky stained indigo a while longer Almost twenty men and women were drawn up around Arcadia in an arc, like her, also facing the sea

The Poison People were not quiet about their approach, but Arcadia refused to turn toward them Instead, she rose to stand right at the crumbling edge, her bare toes dug into the rotten rock and scant soil, the egg burning cold in her hand She'd slipped it from the cradle of Papa's hair and woven that last remnant of her father into her own hair during the night

You are come for me," she called. Somehow, with the egg in her hand, Arcadia's voice carried farther, stronger than it ever would have unaided

A scuffle rose behind her Still not turning, Arcadia said, "Let them pass

After a moment, Stone Blue clanked to a halt on her right On Arcadia's left stood a woman who might have stepped out of a mirror—light brown hair, Papa's green eyes, everything—holding hands with one of the Pleasant People Arcadia had forgotten how small the Pleasant People were. their little furry bodies no taller than her chest. Of course, they'd been head high to her the last time she saw them

"There is no Water Castle." Stone Blue said. "I have looked everywhere in this misbegotten country of corn and forests."

Welcome, sister," Arcadia said, ignoring the priest. She nodded courteously at her Poison double

The other Arcadia shifted, seeming uncomfortable The resemblance was beginning to make the hairs on Arcadia's neck prickle. The Pleasant Person nodded gravely without speaking

What do we look for now?" asked Stone Blue "Sunlight on water is pretty, but I assure you, the sea is always the same."

"I carry my father with me," Arcadia said to her double "Whom do you carry?"

You," whispered the double. Its voice sounded creaky, barely audible over the wind whipping the headland. "I carry you."

"The sea took my father from me," Arcadia said, answering both the double and the priest, "swept him away on a bubbling tide. But I saved the most important part of him even from that

The egg burned her hand. It was time She finally understood what had happened to Papa, what he had dug within his tunic for "I saved his heart

With that, she cocked her arm back and hurled the egg out to the sea. It spun, flashing in the morning sun, trailing a faint spume of her father's heart s blood, arcing past the surf to fall toward the gray swells farther out from shore. It was as if the egg were a small blue bird, taken wingless flight to flee the tyranny of the shore

Then it struck the water, the splash nearly invisible except for the glint and gleam of it

Nothing happened, save the ceaseless heaving of the waves

"That's it?" Stone Blue said after a few minutes, sounding disgusted. "I spent two years of my life waiting for some silly chit to throw a rock into the ocean?"

Arcadia had spent six years of her life *carrying* the egg He was wrong, the blue priest It didn't matter what had happened. It only mattered what she had done. She turned back to her double and the Pleasant Person

"Did you get what you expected? Have you won your war?"

"Your people are not gone," said the Pleasant Person, finally speaking "Our people have not recovered their homes No, we did not find what we sought "

"What now?" Arcadia asked She took her double's free hand, the one the Pleasant Person was not holding

"We wish an end," said the double, almost wistfully "A return to commerce and farming and art, but as . . partners Not servants or slaves."

You do?" Arcadia asked "Are you the same as them?" She nodded at the Pleasant Person

Her Poison double seemed ready to cry "I am theirs, made in your image

Then Stone Blue gasped

Arcadia looked up, out to sea. A pillar of water rose from the ocean swells, as ephemeral as any wave and yet as solid as granite The morning sun over the mountains filled it with light, the greatest gem the world had ever seen

As they watched, the pillar ramified, doubling and tripling, broadening at the base and growing branches at the top, until it became the Water Castle, a giant fortress of water on a giant water hill, poised as if to crash to thunderous surf at any moment

"Cut me now," said the double "Open my head, let the worms out, claim your humanity "

Arcadia stared at the Water Castle Her father's castle, to which he had given his heart s strength. She'd never really believed in the magics of the Goddess, let alone charlatan tricks of wizardry. Like her father's deepest learnings, this had to be something of the world "Stay," she said absently to the double, "and rejoice Pleasant Person, is this castle your work?"

"No ma'am," said the Pleasant Person. "We cannot see into your hearts, and that is a thing of the human heart

"The Water Castle," Stone Blue finally whispered

"Tell them in the south that the Corn Coast has its own magics and its own powers," Arcadia said to him

Then she reached up and tugged the strands of her father's hair from her braid. "These I give to you," she told the double, "that we might be one and the same " She twirled Papa s woven hair into the double's hair "Here is your Papa "

Arcadia dropped on one knee, facing the Pleasant Person "To you, I can only offer apologies and welcome you back to your own world Many will struggle against this, for many more are gone than yet live People hold grudges Sherk and Robert will help you, and perhaps this Blue Priest here as well "

"Where are you going?" asked Stone Blue. He tried to grab Arcadia's arm, but she shrugged him off

"To visit the castle of my father's heart," she said, and leaped from the cliff, diving like an arrow across the rocks below and the pounding surf, following the egg down to the ocean swells and the Water Castle towering high above them

Long after she was gone, Arcadia's power remained.

The double took her name, but without pretense. Sherk and Robert made treaties and concessions and occasional small wars to bring a new peace to the Corn Coast. That peace eventually spread south like a stain on the water

Stone Blue sailed home, caught above the chasm between his own sere, dusty faith and the power of the Water Castle He found himself one day atop the Oracle's stool at Blackwater, denying his new divinity with every breath

As for the Water Castle, it was gone like the morning fog No one ever saw it but the few folk on the headland Neither Arcadia's partisans nor the Pleasant Person's army would testify to it, except for Sherk and Robert

Her body never came to shore, though a watch was set for months The double seemed to know everything Arcadia had done and everyone she had cared for In time, with the double's example, folk forgave the Poison People

Years later Robert awoke one morning, once more camped on the headland with an equally aged Sherk, to find his boon companion had passed away in the night There were damp fingerprints on Sherk's closed eyes, and the red lines of a woman's palm pressed hard against his hand

As she'd made no promises to Robert, he wept for both Arcadia and Sherk, then took his own swim to the towering castles of the morning sea ❧

WORDS & MUSIC

By Kate Riedel ❧ Illustration by Chris Cocozza

"We don't buy textbooks." ❧ Not even an insincere "sorry." The hard corners of the books in the knapsack dug into Sophe's back as she swung it onto her shoulders and turned to go. ❧ "You need a job," he called after her. ❧ "So?" But her feet slowed. ❧ "So I can give you one." ❧ "So." Sophe swung around, staggering under the weight of the knapsack. "So I've never operated a cash register. So I don't like working with the public. So I don't think I'm exactly what you're looking for, OK?" ❧ "You can learn that stuff. Minimum wage, but there's a bachelor apartment on the second floor goes with the job. Furnished. It was mine when I started here." ❧ "Why me?" ❧ He reached up to scratch his head at the edge of his yarmulke, like a mechanic scratching his head under his greasy cap just before giving an unfavorable diagnosis on your car. ❧ "Search me," he said finally. "Maybe The Bookstore could use a pretty face. Jake," he added, holding out his hand. ❧ *Dirty old man*, Sophe thought. But she couldn't go back to Grandma, not after flunking out. ❧ It was a firm, dry handshake. ❧ She moved into the apartment and shoved the knapsack, still stuffed with the unsellable textbooks, to the back of the closet. No room for a piano *here*, she thought as she looked around. ❧ Jake lived on the third floor. I can handle *that*, she thought. ❧ But the occasion never arose. ❧ Sophe learned to operate the cash register and to do the totals at the end of the day. ❧ With her first paycheck she bought herself a bottle of Scotch, mostly because Grandma wouldn't have approved. ❧ She shelved the books that Jake priced, squeezing through narrow aisles to read the hand-lettered labels thumbtacked to the dark-stained shelves: Literature. History. Philosophy. Science. Religion. Art. Music. Shifted the stacks of books on the floor, stacks that built up again as soon as she had reduced them. ❧ "Excuse me.

More is going on in the mysterious little bookshop than even the experienced fantasy reader might suspect.

A woman, not young, not old, not a regular customer. "Would you have a book called *Our Animal Friends at Maple Hill Farm*?"

Sophe knew enough by now to answer, "Sorry, we don't carry children's books."

Except she wanted to say yes so badly that it took a physical effort to say even the first word.

"Have you looked?" Jake asked behind her.

So she paused, as if checking directions at a street corner, then turned to the Art shelves.

"It's by a couple named Provenson," the woman said.

Patterson … Picasso . . Pisarro … And there it was, a large-format, brightly colored picture book. *Our Animal Friends at Maple Hill Farm.*

Not there when she had shelved the Pisarro book this morning.

"Oh!" said the woman. "Oh! How — how much?"

Sophe opened it. The price penciled on the flyleaf was in her own handwriting.

"Oh!" said the woman. "Are you sure …" And then she saw the name beside the price, the proud, straggly letters of a child who has just learned to print his own name, and she burst into tears even as she dug for her wallet.

"What was *that* all about?" Sophe asked Jake after the woman had left.

"Why I hired you."

"What if she comes back? What if she expects us to do it again?"

"They never come back."

Jake taught her to price books, and what to pay for books offered for sale. Sophe learned for herself, from the students and professors who frequented The Bookstore, what to buy.

The students threw names and words around The Bookstore like tennis balls in an elaborate game of keep-away. Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Russell, Wittgenstein. Dialectic, epistemology, heunsm, phenomenology, speculum.

Sophe dated some of the students, who told her, over pizza or egg rolls, what the words meant. Jake was never around when she brought her dates back late at night, for Scotch. For whatever. But one morning as she was opening the cash register he said, "It's not a good idea to foul your own nest."

Sophe gave his retreating back the finger, but she knew already that she was tired of the condescending tones in which the definitions were pronounced. Why waste good Scotch?

That night she hauled her old knapsack out of the closet, dumped out the textbooks, and began to read them.

The next day she phoned her grandmother for the first time in over a year.

"I'm working in a bookstore, Grandma."

"That's nice," her grandmother said. "Do you like it?"

"I guess. But I don't want to do it forever."

"What do you want to do?"

Sophe didn't have the answer to that one. She did have the answer if Grandma brought up the piano, but Grandma didn't.

I wonder if you've heard of …" A middle-aged man with a ketchup-stained tie. "A pamphlet … Vienna, the late 1920s . ."

At the far end of the Philosophy shelves, between two steel blue dust jacketed Louisiana State University imprints, she found a grimy pamphlet in gray paper covers. *Hegelscheiss.* E. Voegelin, *Wien 1929.*

She'd straightened this section half an hour earlier. Not there, then.

Paper crumbs drifted from the edges of the cover as she turned to the price.

Outrageous.

"My-my-my," the man with the ketchup-stained tie said. "I wouldn't have believed the great man could be that crude. But he was young, then."

He paid without a quibble.

Sophe learned to do the bookkeeping and banking.

She began to take books upstairs with her at night, starting with literature and skipping ahead to history whenever she needed to put things in context. She learned that Beowulf was better in Old English. That Joyce got off on the smell of farts and the sound of words. That Proust may or may not have paid to watch pins being stuck into a live rat, but was the world's best listener this side of God. That Chinese poetry could never be adequately translated into English. She took to drinking Glenlivet half-and-half with hot water, because that was Stevenson's tipple. It went well with Shakespeare.

For a while she shared her Scotch with a daffident young music student. Years later, she would buy and listen to his CDs, but never try to get in touch with him.

"I thought you liked him," Jake said.

"I did."

"So why'd you let him go?"

"I took piano when I was kid. Played for church every Sunday. Got sick of it."

"That's no answer."

"I found a Mendelssohn piano sonata for him."

"So?"

"One of the juvenilia pieces. You know, the ones that went missing during World War II and haven't been seen since."

"Oh." *They never come back.*

Sophe learned to recognize and confront book thieves.

She moved on in her reading to philosophy, starting with Aristotle and ending, a great many bottles of Scotch later, with Wittgenstein. All those words, having once been explained so condescendingly to her over pizza, really meant so little. Except, perhaps, "heurism." She enjoyed Eric Voegelin on Hegel.

Her grandmother died, and for the first time since she'd moved in Sophe slept away from The Bookstore while she arranged for the funeral.

She donated the old upright piano to the church, telling herself Grandma would have wanted that.

"Your grandmother was so proud of you," the minister told her. "Would you …"

"No," Sophe said, and then, in an attempt to soften it, "I haven't played for years."

But when the congregation rose to sing Charles Wesley's

'And can it be that I should gain
An interest in my Saviour's blood?'

to Campbell's "Sagina," she wished she were playing, because she could not sing.

When she boxed things to go to the Salvation Army she kept an eye out for the Moroccan-bound hymn book that had never been far from her grandmother's hand. But she did not find it.

This feels too much like coming home, she thought to herself when she returned to The Bookstore, and she bought a paper to look over the help wanted ads.

But the only jobs for which she was qualified were in other bookstores. And they didn't pay enough to cover separate rent.

I don't know what it was called."

A girl in jeans, t-shirt, sneakers, windbreaker. "It was just mimeographed."

The Bookstore didn't ordinarily deal in ephemera, but Applied Sciences yielded a tattered military document on making explosives from readily available ingredients. The girl had to go to the bank to get enough money to pay for it, and Sophe didn't think she'd be back. She wondered what would happen to the document then. But she never found out.

Sophe had some qualms about that one, particularly after the incident at the Consulate a few weeks later, but when she tried to talk to Jake about it he said only, "It's out of our hands."

"Well, maybe we should wash them anyway."

Jake began to take her along when he evaluated libraries.

She moved on, evenings, to the sciences Physics and chemistry might as well have been in a foreign language, but she plodded through them because she suspected that their words, at least some of them, might actually stand for real things.

When she reached astronomy she climbed to the roof via the fire escape, where, despite The Bookstore being in the middle of the city, there was a remarkably clear view of the night sky. On her way down she sometimes stopped to listen at the door that led into Jake's apartment. Sometimes she thought she heard music, sometimes dancing, sometimes voices raised in argument But she never saw anyone come or go from the top floor apartment, any more than she had ever been in it herself

I know you probably don't ..." a tiny, white-haired man holding his hat against his chest. "But "

"We do," said Sophe, and there on the astronomy shelf sat all five volumes of Houseman s *Manilius*, hand-bound in brown-and-cream marbled paper and half-calf, gold-edged and gold-stamped and looking good enough to eat.

"Oh!" said the customer. "Oh. I just wanted the books. I didn't expect them to be *beautiful* "

The price was far less than she guessed

She moved on to the natural sciences She especially loved reading about trees, how their root systems were both shallower and wider that most people realized

When Sophe suggested a computer would be useful, Jake told her to go ahead She set up spreadsheets and a database and built a Web site for the store. Maybe, with all these computer skills she'd learned But she'd need new clothes if she wanted to job-hunt

She reached religion Animism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism A commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* explained that while words in other languages were only symbols for reality, in Hebrew words *were* reality.

"Jake," she said, "will you teach me to read Hebrew?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because everybody these days is so damned busy trying to understand other peoples' religions they neglect their own. The former owner of the store was a Buddhist. Did I ask to learn Sanskrit? I did not. Next thing you'll be wearing a bit of dirty red string around your wrist and claiming it was wrapped around the tomb of Rachel. What were you raised?"

"Methodist "

"So what's wrong with Methodism? John Wesley was a very interesting man Plagued by poltergeists Anyway, you're too old to study Torah."

"Akiba started when he was forty "

"Well, you can't. You're a girl "

"Not any more by your own account," she said to his retreating back as he left for lunch

"Jake never even wore a yarmulke until he took over the store," an old customer volunteered from the Theology section "Used to sit right where you are, bare-headed and eating ham sandwiches "

"My life is so directionless," she complained, since she had an audience "I mean, who's running it? *I'm* sure not "

But the customer had wandered out of earshot and into Philosophy

Sophe fingered the chords to "And Can It Be?" on the wooden countertop Jake had never before told her anything about himself No, not quite true. The day he'd hired her, he'd told her he'd lived in the bachelor apartment on the second floor

For the first time it occurred to her to wonder, who had hired *Jake?* She shrugged Like the hymn said, "Let angel minds inquire no more "

The next generation of students arrived that fall to play catch with Ingaray, Deleuze, and Derrida, deconstruction, postcolonialism, and postmodernism

"Excuse me ..."

A young woman wearing faded black-on-black embroidered India cotton, a crystal on a black cord around her neck, a Celtic-design tattoo curling a flabby upper arm

"I'm looking for a book." She reached up to brush dyed black hair away from her eyebrow ring, and a circlet of dirty red cord fell back on her wrist. "It's called *Sefer Brie*."

"We don't carry cookbooks," Sophe said deliberately.

"It's, like, a grimoire? You know, like magick?" Sophe could almost hear the "k" on the end.

Something was off kilter, but there it was, and was a grimoire any worse than a bomb manual?

"Just a minute " Sophe led her to Religion. Judaica Probably right next to *Sefer Yetzirah*

But it wasn t

"Sorry," said Sophe. But ... "Check back," she said.

"What s *Sefer Brie*?" Sophe asked Jake later

"Now where did you hear about *that*?"

"A customer "

"Really "

"So what is it?"

"Not Brie *Briyah* According to Maimonides, *Yetzirah* is creation from something, *Briyah* from nothing."

"I assume that *Sefer Briyah* is *not* a grimoire "

"*Sefer Briyah* may or may not have been written down by Akiba from the dictation of an angel. Or direct from ... hmmm. The only transcription of it, perhaps by the Karas of Prague, was said to have been destroyed in the earthquake at Safed, but if so, how did it come to be in the hands of the Ba'al Shem Tov when he died? It was listed, briefly, in the card catalogue of a synagogue library in New Jersey. It wasn't on the shelf, of course, and when I went back to the catalogue the card was gone "

She waited for him to go on, but he went to lunch instead

The girl in black was looking through the window. Someone was with her, a shadowy figure concealed by the angle of the window Sophe closed her eyes. When she opened them, the sidewalk was empty

You said to check back "

The girl's pal had followed her into the store and stood looking over the shelves nearest the door. An emaciated man? Or a tall woman?

"You *said* to check back," the girl repeated, as if speaking to an elderly person who was deaf or not-quite-bright, or both.

"No," said Sophe *I'm turning into Jake*, she thought

The girl stomped out of the store and her shadow followed at a distance Not friends, then

"You know," said Jake, "I did ask the previous owner to teach me Sanskrit "

"What did he say?" Sophe asked. *The third thing he's told me about himself*, she thought *Not counting that slip about the synagogue library in New Jersey*

"She. She said, 'What? You want to be a hermit in a cave on a mountaintop? Let me tell you, mountaintops aren't so thick on the ground these days. Why didn't you stick at *schule*?'"

"So why didn't you?"

"Why didn't you stick to Methodism? If I had to be a Christian I'd be a Methodist. If anything could compensate for being a teetotaller it would be all that good music Those Wesleys could sure pick the tunes to spite the devil "

"What about the blood and hellfire and damnation?"

"Huh! So is life all warm fuzzies and pats on the head? Jesus was crucified, Akiba flayed alive "

"What about Buddhism?"

Continued on page 96

The way of the prophet is never an easy one, but it can help to know which god you're prophesying for.

The Right God

BY RICHARD PARKS • ILLUSTRATION BY HUGO MARTIN

Don Lang was not a happy man. His unhappiness wasn't due to the fact that hundreds—perhaps thousands—of new gods were physically manifesting all over the world. Granted, this *was* a very vexing thing, but for the most part people were dealing with this development surprisingly well. No, what was really steaming Don's buns was that a particular god named Rockball had marked Don for a singular honor.

Prophet.

Don did not want to be a prophet, and especially not to a sawed-off little runt of a god named Rockball. Don's opinion on the matter had not been solicited.

"What sort of a name for a god is 'Rockball'?"

"*Mine*, of course," said Rockbal.

Rockball was currently manifesting in Don's shaving mirror, which was making shaving that morning somewhat awkward. Don got through it by angling his face forty-five degrees to one side of the mirror or the other, depending on which way Rockball's squat brown visage was turned at the time. Sometimes Don couldn't decide if Rockball's face looked more like a shriveled apple or crudely carved stone, but either way the god couldn't seem to stand still, there in mirror land. Don grabbed a square of tissue to staunch a cut and studied the result as best he could. He wondered if, perhaps, his black hair was showing a little more gray today. At his age he expected a few gray hairs, but lately Don thought perhaps he had more of an excuse than usual.

"You've got the wrong man, you know. I'm no prophet."

"Why?" Rockball asked reasonably. "What's wrong with you?"

Don sighed. "I'm forty-three, twice divorced, I live alone … well, except for you, and I'm pretty sure that keeping a god in my apartment is a violation of my lease. I'm not even allowed to have an aquarium. That's just for starters, and I'm sure I can think of more."

"Waste of time," said Rockball. "Besides, I'm not a goldfish."

Don still wasn't quite sure what to make of Rockball. He said he was a god and Don had no reason to question that. Gods were everywhere these days. All the talking heads on TV were arguing about what it meant and whether the breakdown of the home church, social mores or planetary alignment was at fault, but no one had the answer. The government claimed to be working on the problem but, for the most part, everyone just coped as best they could.

Once they got over the initial shock, people learned that dropping a coin or two in a little tin pot by the station helped the trains run on time. And that emptying that tin pot when no one was looking brought a plague of boils and halitosis, and thus they also learned to leave the pot alone. Students who burned sticks of incense before the stone lions at the library found their grades improving. Wives and husbands and boyfriends and girlfriends who prayed before the statue of a green woman that appeared in Central Park found that formerly cheating lovers stayed home, or left for good, depending on the prayer.

There were, as many people now admitted, advantages to the new situation. There was less uncertainty these days. Once people found the right god, good things could happen. People who had never had plans or direction in their entire lives were suddenly finding purpose. So, while world leaders made soothing promises and experts talked, ordinary people got on with their lives. Don, for his part, wasn't really one of them. He had neither purpose nor direction, just like before.

He did, like it or not, have Rockball.

Don glared. "Just what are you the god of, anyway?

Rockball glared at him. "I don't know."

Don just stood there in front of the mirror for a moment, blinking, like some small animal caught in a spotlight. "What do you mean 'You don't know?'"

"It's sort of complicated," said Rockball.

Don shook his head. "No it isn't. I don't pretend to understand divine nature, but I *do* know that every god and goddess who's popped up so far has a niche, and there's a sort of instinctive understanding of that from all concerned. That's why those impromptu shrines are springing up everywhere. How can I be your prophet if I don't even know what you're about?"

There was an oddly hopeful tone in Rockball's voice. "A real prophet would figure it out."

"Well, there's your answer, because I have no idea," Don said, and Rockball just sighed.

"Exactly. Not that I expected better."

Don wiped the remnants of shaving cream and blood off his face. "I don't have time for this. I have to go to work."

"Later," was all Rockball said, and he disappeared from the mirror.

Don got dressed and caught his bus to work, only to find out that what he had told Rockball was, apparently, in error. He had all the time in the world.

It took a few moments for Don to comprehend what his harried looking supervisor was telling him. "I'm fired?" Don asked finally.

His supervisor was apologetic but firm. "There's been a budget shortfall and the department had to take a cut. You're the least senior staff member, Don, so there really wasn't any choice."

After that things went very fast. Don had his exit interview and was back on the street in less than an hour. Don knew all the reasons he should be angry. He knew that, at his age, there would be companies reluctant to hire him. He knew that the economy was not in great shape and finding another job in any case was not going to be easy. He even knew that there was a distinct possibility that Rockball had a hand in all this. Yet Don was having a hard time caring about any of that. He knew he should, but that didn't change the fact.

Perhaps it would have been different if he had a family to support, or other obligations, but Don had been on his own for some time, drifting from position to position, never too long at one place despite the fact that his computer skills and experience were first-rate. The position at the accounting firm was the first noncontract job he'd held in years, and he'd rather fallen into that at the time. He wasn't particularly attached to it. He wasn't even totally sure what he'd been doing there anyway, one set of numbers was pretty much like another to him.

It's not like I've spent most of the money I've made as it is. I can coast a few months if I have to, not even counting unemployment.

That still left the problem of what he was going to do about the god in his apartment. Don thought of moving but, if he was the god's prophet, giving his deity the slip couldn't be so simple as that.

Could it?

Since leaving the office Don had just been walking without much thought of a direction. He stopped for a moment to get his bearings and realized he had just crossed Jericho Street at the Municipal Park was just a block or so away. The morning was nice after the rain of the last few days, someone must have found the right weather god. Don strolled along the sidewalk, taking some time to enjoy the day even as he puzzled over what to do. He found a park bench just under the shade of a massive legacy oak and sat down to think, right after checking the tree to make sure there were no shrines about. Nature spirits had become almost as common as gods, and they tended to get irritable when someone used the bounty of their home without permission. Still, so far as Don could see, no one had taken residence in the tree as of yet.

Don looked across the park. There were a few students from the nearby college. A pair of co-eds were lying half-dressed on a blanket catching some sun, another group of students was quietly studying, but there weren't many other people around. The park would get busier around lunchtime as office workers from all over downtown gravitated there to eat and visit, but for now it was quiet.

It didn't stay that way.

"I have come to share the Word of Stonemother."

Don looked up into what he assumed were the eyes of a female street-corner preacher. He hadn't seen one in a long time, female or otherwise. Probably not at all since the early days of the Great Emergence, as the pundits had taken to calling it, before the trappings of the formerly dominant religions had begun to unravel. They survived only as pocket communities and scattered cults now, so far as Don knew.

It took him a moment or two, but exactly what the woman had said finally registered. Stonemother. Who the heck was Stonemother? Don sighed. Not a preacher—a prophet, like he was supposed to be. Don had seen a few of those, too, and much more recently, but this woman didn't quite fit the profile. He

One small figure perched on each of the shoulders of the mugger like a pair of ugly brown goblins.

looked her more closely up and down. She was a little younger than he was, perhaps mid to late thirties. Dark curly hair, tall, rather pretty from what he could tell through the scowl on her face, but that wasn't what finally drew his attention. It was her eyes. There was no burning fanaticism there, or even conviction. She looked tired. Embarrassed. Angry.

"You're no prophet," Don said. "You don't even want to be here, do you?"

She glared even more. "I do so! I am so! I am the Prophet of Stonemother, come to bring you her Word!"

Don sighed. "And what is this 'word'?"

She just stared at him for a moment. The scowl faded and she slumped a bit, looking defeated. "Well, to tell the truth I'm not entirely sure. I know this doesn't make a lot of sense."

Don found himself smiling. "Try. I'll listen."

"Umm, do you mind if I sit down? I've been walking all over this place trying to get my nerve up. I'm beat."

"Not at all. My name's Don, by the way." Don sang.

She extended her hand and Don took it, briefly. "Amelia Carson," she said, then smiled. "Not much of a name for a prophet, is it?"

"No worse than Don Lang."

She turned then, and looked at him intently. "You too? When?"

"This morning." Don told her about Rockball and his decision to make Don his prophet. "Which is really silly, since he doesn't even know what he's the god *of* yet. What kind of a message is that? Hear me, o people, and know that I am the Lord of ... something really important, and you better listen!' I mean, really."

"It's the same with Stonemother," Amelia said, looking glum. "But if I didn't at least try, she said she was going to make something bad happen. I believe her; she's done it before. I lost my job yesterday."

"This morning for me. Are you sure it was Stonemother?"

"Pretty darn sure. Listen, if she asks, can I say I shared the word with you? I mean, I can deal with unemployment for a little while, but I don't want my apartment building burned down around me. At least I have a place to sleep for the moment, though if Stonemother keeps acting up my roommates are going to toss me out anyway."

"I'd be glad to. Maybe you can do the same for me."

"Deal. Though I have to wonder why our gods are so unhappy, most of the others are fairly easy to relate to. Why are these two so difficult?"

"That's a good question," said Don.

Neither said anything for a while. Don watched someone throw a coin into the park fountain, saw the small hand that snaked up out of the water to accept the offering. He shook his head. "You see it every day, and it doesn't seem so strange anymore. No matter how strange it is."

Amelia sighed. "Don't you ever wonder? I mean, how it happened? Why it happened?"

"I've heard the theories." Don said. "That mankind's beliefs became too fragmented to support a consistent cosmology, that these are some sort of psychic manifestation or shared hallucination."

Amelia snorted in derision. "... and you give all that about as much credence as I do. Mankind's beliefs have always been fragmented and there's never been a 'unified cosmology,' whatever that nonsense phrase is supposed to mean. The gods appeared whether we believed in them or not. They're here whether we believe in them or not. They don't seem subject to our beliefs."

"Unlike Christianity?"

"Mostly, but not just them. I mean, what good is faith in the numinous and invisible when deities are popping out of the bushes left and right? About the only people unaffected were some strains of Buddhism and the animists, so far as I can see."

"Whereas everyone else went a little bonkers, at least at first. You've been looking into this, I see."

Amelia shrugged. "Trying to make some sense of it. There doesn't seem to be a great deal."

Don watched the small arm and hand slowly withdraw back beneath the surface of the fountain. "Maybe it just means that the world never worked the way we thought it did. Either way, that doesn't help us with our problem."

Don said it so easily that it took him a moment to realize just what he *had* said. "Our problem." He thought about it for a moment and shrugged. Why not? Don hadn't really thought of it before, but he realized it felt good to talk to someone else about a shared problem. He couldn't even remember the last time that had happened. Don glanced at Amelia, feeling suddenly self-conscious and shy, but if she took any note of the reference she didn't show it. She was just sitting there, eyes closed. She appeared to be dozing.

"Tired?"

"Hmmm? Oh, I didn't get much sleep last night. Stonemother and I had a huge fight after I was laid off."

Don made a decision. "Tell you what. Go home and get some rest. I'll vouch for your prophet-ing, if need be."

"Thanks. You're a nice person." She got up, and Don hesitated. "Before you go ... listen, are you free tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow and every day," Amelia sighed, "thanks to Stonemother. Why?"

"Well, if you've got nothing better to do, meet me at the park about 11AM. I'll pack a lunch. We can talk some more, if you don't mind. Maybe we can figure out something."

"That would be nice, but I'm not convinced we can."

Don shrugged. "For the record—me neither."

She smiled then. "Also for the record, I don't need to be convinced. I'll settle for hope. Till tomorrow, then."

One problem with packing a lunch every day for more than a few days at a time was getting a good variety. On the third day of what had turned into a standing date between Don and Amelia, it occurred to Don that he should have asked if Amelia was Jewish, or vegan. Even if the old ways were a bit out of favor at the moment they hadn't gone away entirely and habits like dietary strictures were hard to break. Perhaps she was just being polite before now? He settled for chicken sandwiches, plus fruit and a nice pasta salad, just in case. Rockball watched him from his perch on top of the cabinet.

"What are you doing?" asked the god.

"Packing a lunch; I'm meeting someone."

"Again? And what has this to do with being my prophet?"

"Quite a bit. She's the one I've been spreading the word with," Don said. "We talked about you extensively yesterday, and the day before." Which, Don allowed to himself, was more or less the truth. He wondered if Amelia was having a similar conversation with Stonemother about now.

Rockball didn't interfere. He seemed oddly thoughtful.

Don kept working. "By the way, I meant to ask—it was you who got me fired, wasn't it?"

"Yes." Rockball said.

Don nodded. "I thought so."

"You don't seem upset," Rockball said, frowning.

"Were you trying to upset me?"

The god frowned. "Not as such. It was purely a show of force to get you to take your obligations toward me seriously."

"Oh, I do. Believe me. That's what these meetings are about," Don said. "We intend to discuss your divine self extensively."

Rockball frowned again. "Well... I guess that's alright then."

Don nodded. He intended to make his statement neither more nor less true than it needed to be.

"Rockball, I have a question—can you leave the house?"

"Can I...? You've already been fired, Mortal. Are you trying for that by a bus?"

Don had the distinct feeling that Rockball was bluffing. Not that he *couldn't* have managed such an event, but Don didn't believe that the godling really wanted to harm him. Don wasn't sure why; he wondered if this feeling was anything like faith.

"I'm not asking you to leave, Rockball. I'm asking if you *can*. Is your manifestation tied to this apartment, this building?"

"Why?"

"My lease is up soon. I'm thinking of renting a house."

Rockball frowned. "I'll go where you go."

"Why? Do you like me that much?"

"You're my prophet. I go where you go," Rockball repeated, as if the fact was obvious. Which, Don thought, perhaps it was.

That's what I thought," Don said, and he didn't say anything else. He finished packing the lunch basket and went to catch the bus. Later, he sat with Amelia on the same park bench where they had first met.

"You make a really fine chicken sandwich," Amelia said. "I'm starting to feel guilty sponging off of you for the last few days."

"No need, and thanks. I've been eating my own cooking for several years now. It seemed like a good idea to become decent at it."

"Most men wouldn't bother to learn to cook." Amelia said. "Or clean, come to that."

"Is that so? Why?"

She shrugged. "No idea. But I've seen enough of it myself and heard my roommate's horror stories. The guys take a girl home expecting a hot time in the middle of what amounts to a pigsty. The guys are always surprised when the lady suddenly isn't too keen. A guy who can both cook and clean is quite a catch. Why is it you're still single, if you don't mind my asking?"

"I wasn't, or haven't always been. I've been married before, it just never worked out."

"Why not?"

"For my first marriage, we were both too young, I think. No idea what we wanted, but finally decided it wasn't each other. The second failed, apparently because I'm a bit of an emotional cold fish, or at least that's what Julie told me. She was my second wife."

Amelia was studying him closely. "I don't get that from you at all. I mean, you're not exactly a firecracker—oh, don't look like that. You know it's true. But it's not a personality flaw. Mostly you just look a little ... lost."

"Maybe I am. So. What about you?" It was a topic Don had meant to raise before now, but it had seemed more important to stick to their shared problem, at least at first.

Amelia didn't say anything for a little while. "This wasn't how I had my life planned, if that's what you mean. I expected to be married, have children, all of those things."

"It didn't happen?" Don asked.

"No. I thought I was in love, a time or two. Either I was wrong or there was just one of us in love and that doesn't work too well. Believe me, I tested the theory very thoroughly. Perhaps even stubbornly so. So now I'm thirty-eight, straight, and still living with two other women who seem stuck in an eternal sorority house state of mind." She smiled grimly. "I think the label you're groping for is 'loser.'"

"You're not a loser," Don said quietly.

She smiled again. "That's sweet, but you don't know."

Amelia finished her sandwich, took a sip of tea from the thermos, and changed the subject. "Any new ideas about our gods? That is why we come here, isn't it?"

"Well ... not entirely," Don said. "But I *have* been thinking about it for the last few days."

Amelia acted as if she didn't hear the first part of what Don had said, though he was pretty sure she had heard everything. "So what have you thought about?" she asked.

"I'm thinking that perhaps your Stonemother and my Rockball are different from the other gods. Look around; do you notice anything consistent about the others?"

There were three main shrines in the park nearby. One was the fountain, with its scaly hand and arm snatching up offerings. The other was a small tumulus of stones near the edge of the common where the deity called the Black Lady manifested for an appropriate offering. The last one was at an ancient live oak near the park entrance, a nature spirit composed mostly of leaves and twigs haunted the lower branches.

Amelia frowned. "They don't seem to have a lot in common. What am I missing?"

"Place. Each deity manifests at a particular site and no other. It will sometimes move limited distances, maybe a few hundred feet. I've seen that, but it never stays away for long, and it always returns to within close proximity to its shrine."

Amelia's mouth fell open. "You're right! Hell, there's even one who hangs out in the turnstile at the bus station, according to the papers. Why didn't I see that?"

Don couldn't help preening a little. "I'm sure you would have sooner or later. The point is that Rockball doesn't have this problem, and I'm betting your god doesn't either."

"I don't know. I usually see Stonemother in the apartment."

"Because you're there a lot, yes? Same for Rockball. Is that the only place you've seen her?"

"Well ... no. I do believe I saw her where I used to work right before I got fired. It's several miles from the office."

Don nodded. "The thing that's really different about both of them is that they're not attached to a place. They're attached to *us*. Rockball as much as said so."

Amelia let out a deep sigh. "I think you're right, and how did we get so damn lucky? Good question. A better one would be, What the hell blazes do we do about it?"

"I don't know, but there's something that Rockball said once that keeps bothering me. When I asked him what he was the god *of*, he turned the question back on me, as if he didn't know and I'm supposed to."

"Stonemother is the same way. She's never clear on what message I'm supposed to send, I told you that. And when I ask her, she gets mad! How am I supposed to deal with that?"

Don didn't say anything for a while. Then, "I'm going to rent a house."

Amelia blinked. "Well ... that's nice. How does this help? Or are you just making conversation?"

"I don't know that it does help. It's certainly not the best time for such a thing. So why am I doing it?"

"You're asking me?"

Don nodded. "Yes. I am."

Amelia laughed then. "You're starting to sound like Stonemother."

"Maybe. My lease is up and I'm going to rent a house. Decided all at once. I've already found it, signed the papers. Unemployed and all, but I'm doing it. I thought Rockball put the notion in my head, but he thought I was trying to ditch him and only noted that it wouldn't work."

Amelia smiled a little wistfully. "Does it have a picket fence?"

Don nodded. "Sure does. And a big oak tree in the backyard. I always wanted a tree like that."

"Sounds wonderful. May ... may I see it sometime?"

"Why not now? I just picked up the key this morning, it's not too far from here. Shall we go?"

They started to get up, but a rather large young man stepped in front of the bench. He had a small, shiny gun.

"I take, you give," he said, in a disconcertingly cheerful voice. "It's a very simple transaction."

Later Don would wonder just why, but the first thought that popped into his mind was, *Rockball, what did I do this time?*

"No." Amelia said.

Don and the mugger both looked at her. The mugger looked a little confused. "I've made the offerings at the proper shrine and my actions are sanctioned! I've got a gun and, believe me, I *will* shoot you."

"For twenty dollars and a bus token?" Amelia asked.

She was shaking, but she didn't back down.

"Amel... give him what he wants. It's not worth it."

The mugger nodded, still smiling. "Listen to your boyfriend, Lady."

She glared. "He's *not* my boyfriend! I don't have a boyfriend, I don't have a job, and this week I've given up all I intend to, and I'm not giving up any more! Do you hear me you worthless piece of pond scum?! *No more!*"

"Well, there is one more thing," the mugger said.

Don stood up. Now he was shaking, too, and if he'd thought about what he was doing, even for a moment, he probably wouldn't have moved. But he knew the mugger was about to shoot Amelia. It was the man's unrelenting cheerfulness that convinced Don of this; the man wasn't just a mugger—he was nuts. Whether the avalanche of gods had anything to do with that or not was beside the point.

The gun turned on Don. "A hero come to play. How cliché." Then he apparently realized that he'd made a rhyme and he giggled.

"Leave her alone," Don said.

"Make me."

Rockball, if anything happens to Amelia because of you—

"You call that a prayer? Besides, I didn't do it," Rockball said from out of nowhere.

"Nothing's going to happen to Amelia while I'm here," said someone else. Don just blinked. One small figure perched on each of the shoulders of the mugger like a pair of ugly brown goblins. Don recognized Rockball right away, but the other he had not seen before. It was female, but otherwise looked a lot like Rockball. They could have been twins.

"Stonemother...?" Amelia said, looking confused, but no more so than the mugger. Don was the only one of them, other than the two gods, who was not confused. Things suddenly seemed very, very clear to him.

"This man wants to hurt us," Don said.

"I want your money," the mugger said. "Hurting you was a bonus. Now, are these your monkeys? Get them off me!"

Rockball glanced at Stonemother, who nodded. "Count of three?"

"One," said Rockball.

"Two," said Stonemother.

"What?" said the mugger.

"Three," said Rockball and Stonemother together.

The mugger was gone. In his place was a small gray squirrel perched on a pile of empty clothes. The gun lay a few feet away. While it was hard to tell with squirrels, Don was pretty sure that the tree rodent was not smiling.

Rockball and Stonemother towered, relatively speaking, on either side of it.

"Isn't it cute?" Stonemother asked, and she smiled with a lot of very sharp teeth. "Couldn't you just stew it with carrots and eat it up?"

The squirrel apparently read that as a hint and scrambled up the trunk of the oak tree, where it scolded them loudly before launching itself deeper into the branches and out of sight.

"Adjusted rather quickly," said Rockball. "They all do."

"Mortals," said Stonemother, looking disgusted.

The two gods looked at each other, then circled each other warily like two strange dogs at first meeting. After a moment Stonemother yawned and started rummaging through the empty clothes while Rockball transformed the discarded gun into an acorn.

"Are you all right?" Don asked Amelia.

"F-Fine," she said, though she was still shaking. "Thank you." She glanced at the two gods. "I suppose I should thank you, too," she said.

Stonemother just sniffed, and Rockball shrugged. "Don't strain yourself."

"Let's all go see the house," Don said.

Amelia stared, but she wasn't shaking so much. "Now? Shouldn't we call the police?"

"And say what? That we were being mugged, but our mugger is now a squirrel, his gun's an acorn, and here's a description of both? Besides, I think this is the perfect time. We're all together."

"All?" Amelia asked, but Rockball and Stonemother merely glanced at each other and nodded.

"Finally," said Stonemother and Rockball together, but they weren't talking to either Amelia or Don and they didn't say anything else.

Don took Amelia's hand. "I'll explain later, I promise."

Don helped Amelia stand up, and she leaned on his arm a bit as they left the park, the two gods following behind, both couples still a little wary with each other. They passed through the red brick gateway and followed the sidewalk down Leland Street, two blocks to house number 447, a large old Victorian-style home.

"It does have a picket fence," Amelia said. "And a turret! It's nice."

"You always wanted one like that, didn't you?"

"I wanted a lot of things," Amelia said.

It took a moment before they realized that Stonemother and Rockball had walked right past them. They seemed to shimmer as they walked, and then they were not walking. They trotted on all fours like a pair of happy pekingese.

"Foo dogs?" Amelia asked, frowning.

"Guardians," Don corrected. As if to echo his words back, Stonemother and Rockball took positions flanking the front door. Rockball held a ball under his paw, while under her paw Stonemother held a smaller version of herself.

"But I thought they were new sorts of gods," Amelia said. "This is something I've seen before."

"New gods but an old idea, they were always attached to us, we knew that, and this is one way of perceiving their function. That whole 'prophet' thing was just the two of them searching for direction. They didn't know what they were, but then they joined forces to help us and now they do. They're household gods, Amelia."

"Nonsense. I have no family and neither do you!"

Don smiled. "Which is exactly why they've been so all fired *testy*. Their household didn't exist. Yet." He put a slight emphasis on the last word.

Amelia didn't look at him. "I don't understand."

"Sure you do. This is the way they're supposed to be, what they've been waiting for. It's the way we're supposed to be, too."

She glared at him. "Well Aren't you the romantic bastard."

Don sighed. "I know you're being sarcastic, but it's true—I'm not romantic. I don't know how to make that work and, from what you've told me, neither do you. Maybe you still want romance, but I don't. What I want now is a chance to see if my life can be different. *Better*. I think you could stand some of that yourself."

You sure know how to sweet talk a girl," Amelia said primly.

No, I don't, and it gets worse. We're not kids, Amelia. We already know what doesn't work. Don't you think maybe it's time we looked for something that *does* work?"

"We hardly know each other! What, three days? Frankly, Don, I haven't even made up my mind if I *like* you yet," she said, then added, "though I think I do."

Don nodded. "I think I like you too, but the jury's still out. Happy? But what are gods to anyone except a search for meaning? Maybe that's what these two really are all about and why they came to us. Only time will tell, and I'm not asking for anything else. There are two bedrooms with separate baths. If you like, just think of me as a housemate for now ... who doesn't leave pantyhose on the shower rod."

Amelia snickered. "And leaves the toilet seat up, I bet. And ... and this house is too close to the park! Lousy neighborhood."

"Actually, the mugger notwithstanding, it's a very nice neighborhood. Settled. Quiet. Besides," Don glanced at the two guardians, now settled like stone statues on the porch, "I don't think we have much to worry about on that score."

"Well, that's a plus, but I'll have to think about it." Amelia said. "I know I owe you my life—"

Don nodded toward the porch. "You don't owe me anything. You owe *them* your life. Are you going to be the one to tell them it's time to leave?"

Amelia stared at the pair of guardians for a moment. Rockball bared his teeth. After a moment Amelia smiled a rueful smile. "Oh, all right. But there damn well better be a fireplace or the deal's off."

Don smiled too. "In a house this old? Given."

Don and Amelia crossed the threshold together as Stonemother and Rockball, for as long as needed, shut the rest of the world outside. ❧

elfrithe's ghost

Elfrithe stood from her spinning and stretched, her hands nearly touching the thatch of the roof overhead. "I've worked enough," she said to her mother, fair Frithe. "I heard from the herder who sold us the wool yesterday: in the chalk hills to the west is a villa. It was built by the ancients, he said."

By Kij Johnson — *Illustration by* Laurie Harden

"It's dangerous, daughter," said Frithe. She looked round the room at their spindles and looms. "Here is safe."

Fractious, the age of fifteen. Elfrithe laughed. "I wear a knife, sharp as words. The wolves wake at dusk, and the bears not at all until spring. And the Northland invaders cannot come 'til winter seas calm. The villa is near. I can run there and back and be home before dark." So Elfrithe said.

Frithe left her loom, stood to stare out the door. The cold grassy downs had no wonders to hide, and no neighbors nearby only herders, as humble and shaggy as sheep.

A mother fears much, for each moment has risk. She learns to leave be, to let children learn. Still, she dares not ignore certain threats. The villa was like that. "A ghost haunts its halls. It will hurt you," said Frithe.

"I have this charm," Elfrithe said. Between her new breasts lay a scratched copper coin. As a child gleaning grain after harvest she'd found it, and augured a hole, caught the coin on a cord. She held it up high, showed the face on one side, worn almost away. She loved ancient things. "It will guard me. the charm."

But Frithe was wise. "Your charm will not work on the old ones. They made it; their ghosts do not go at its sending."

"Were they demons, the ancients?" Elfrithe asked.

Her mother laughed, a sad sound. "No. Men from far Rome, with dark hair and gold skin, and brown eyes like hounds. small-seeming but handsome. But their ghosts can destroy. I can't save you from them. Please do not go." Upset, Frithe wept, and touched by her tears, Elfrithe swore not to go there that day.

But other days came. At fifteen, the fevers that seep through the skin are fiercer than fear or long-fingered love. So Elfrithe went, but in silence. She ran the long path under dull, sullen skies spattered with rain. She saw no wolves, no bears, and no Northmen—saw nothing but sheep, much-grazed grass, and far trees.

Safe and rain-soaked, Elfrithe came up the long chalk hill to the villa.

The villa was old. The ancients had made it, the dark men of Rome. Centuries ago, they had sailed from the south to steal silver and dogs, came armayed in their armies to claim the long land. Clever in craft, the dark ones created: they built the hemmed road she'd seen to the east, which marched across copses and swamps to the sea. And stories were told, of a city of stone ten days' travel west: ten thousand might dwell there, each with a roof and a room of his own. And north was a wall that straddled the land, its ends sunk in sea.

So they said, and Elfrithe believed this. What wonders might hide in the many-roomed home of men great as gods?

Beneath the hill's brow, rooms surrounded a yard, now waist deep in weeds. Windows were there, dark holes in the golden-white walls. Elfrithe ducked into ghostless gloom.

Dull light and rain dripped through the ruined roof. The girl walked warily, picking her path through rubble and dirt. The dim forms of frescoes filled the pale walls, their blurred lines lost, without sense in the dusk. There were no ghosts.

Into the next room. Here the roof was intact, the walls well-preserved. Painted on one was an urn filled with herbs, the brush strokes so fine that when she looked closely, she saw dew on each leaf. Beneath her feet, a mosaic on the floor was a maze of bright tiles, all gray through the dirt. She knelt near the maze, traced its path with her hands, leaving stripes in the dust but finding no end. Still no ghosts.

Into another. No windows were here, but cold light seeped through a handful of holes left by lost tiles. Except for a stain where water soaked through in one darkened corner, these walls were unweathered, still white.

And a hunt poured across them, a fair painted fresco that filled all the walls. Across a bright field fled a russet-furred stag, its antlers like trees. Long legs stretched out, a half-score of hounds ran behind. And following all came a man, archer's bow in one hand.

Her mother spoke truth. The ancient was dark, and short as Elfrithe: well shaped, gold skinned and bright-eyed, with black curls on his brow. His clothing was simple: a tunic and sandals that tied to mid-calf. The pale fabric's movement was frozen, but Elfrithe saw the limned shape of his thigh. Her chest ached, as though she'd run far.

His mouth laughed, all paint. When she stood close, she saw the brush strokes that shaped eyes, brown and black and a single white dot. She stepped back: the paint vanished and the eyes came to life.

Elfrithe yearned, with a pang like the sharp taste of plums. His skin would be rich with summer's hot smell and taste salty sweet. The lips would be firm and then soft. His hands would put down the bow and embrace her, his clever long fingers caressing her skin. She shivered and wept, and caught up the coin, held it tight to her heart.

Closing her eyes, she stroked the man's image, creating the shadow of form in her mind: thus his thigh, thus his chest. And wrapped in her hand, his flesh would feel—thus. She kissed the cold wall, pressed her face to his throat.

Ghosts are not made of flesh and blood but they are often made of flesh and blood

But a wall does not warm. She stepped back at last and saw paint on her wet, dirty hands. The bright art was blurred; blinded, his eyes.

Five hundred years dead, the man on the wall.

A mother hopes much, but knows more. Elfrithe fled home, and found Frithe waiting, fire at her hearth.

Frithe gathered her close; but still the girl wept, from a pain that no mother can ease. This Frithe knew: *she* had once been fifteen, and walked the chalk hills and been haunted, as well.

The Laily Worm

By Nina Kiriki Hoffman

Illustration by Peter Ferguson

Although a dragon's heart runs hot, vengeance is a dish best served cold.

After our mother died, our father married the worst woman the world did ever see.

My sister Masery and I didn't suspect this at first. Stepmother was nice to us before she had her own child, nice in ways we weren't used to. Most of the things we did with her were never things we had done with our own mother while she lived. Stepmother took us hunting in the forest, taught us to shoot bows and handle knives when my sister was ten and I was eight. "You'll need skills, Stepmother told us. "You can't count on finding the perfect husband, Masery, nor you the perfect wife, Perry, in spite of your royal blood."

Before she transformed us, I had thought Stepmother was teaching us lessons just because we needed them. After, when I had plenty of time to think, I realized she was telling us her own woes. Stepmother had royal blood in her veins; she was born in a foreign court. Our father was royal, too, right enough, as had been our mother, cousins of the king; but Father had quarreled with the queen just after he married Stepmother, and so we were all exiled to Hopelost Keep, a drafty castle in the north, told to watch the wild seas for reivers. Who would rob us here, when the land yielded barely enough for our little settlement to live on? Winters were long and harsh, summers sweet and too soon fled. The growing season was so short we had trouble storing up enough to get us through each freezing winter. Even the animals were skinny and tough. The Norsemen pillaged farther south where they could find gold and iron, better stocked cellars, and warmer women.

Still, Father took his duties seriously, and led his lean and silent soldiers on patrols up and down the coast, watching, always watching. Always absent

At first Stepmother pined for court life, but then she warmed to me and Masery She made no friends among the villagers—they thought her too strange, with her slanting eyes and her accent that changed words into something else. Masery and I were the only ones she talked to, with Father on patrol most of his days and sleeping away from us most nights

Stepmother taught us foreign witchenes, knots to tie in your hair to keep a lover true, knots to tie in your lover's hair to send him away from you Herbs she taught us as well, those to send others to sleep or sweeten their tempers, those to brighten the eye and shine the hair All manner of glamours she taught my sister Masery, and since I was there, I learned as well, though many of these things weren't skills suitable for boys or princes to learn She taught us the art of the needle and kitchen mysteries

I believed she loved us All the things she taught Masery, I believed she thought of Masery as her own daughter As for me, I knew she thought of me as an afterthought and a tagalong, but still, she ruffled my hair sometimes, dropped careless kisses on my cheek, gave me scraps of praise when I managed a trick well Especially she liked my gift with light, to make it dance in darkness, to bend it to shine where no light had shone before

All this changed when, three years after she married my father, Stepmother became pregnant Instead of coming to our rooms in the morning to dress Masery s hair and help her tend to her clothes, Stepmother stayed away from us Masery asked me to help her comb and braid her hair and button her buttons, and in return, I sought her help with mending the knees of my trousers and the elbows of my shirts which tore and frayed often Stepmother no longer bought me new clothing when I outgrew the old, and I was growing

We didn't know why Stepmother stopped caring for us until her belly grew Then I lived in hope of a brother or sister, someone smaller than I on whom I could practice some of the tricks Stepmother had taught me, as Masery had practiced her arts on me

A horrible, strange thing happened. Inside me something huge awoke and looked out through my stomach with burning orange eyes.

One day when Stepmother was in her seventh month, she called me and Masery to her and said, "It is time for you children to go to court and foster with the king "

I wondered how we were to go to court when the queen had banished our family. Perhaps Stepmother had corresponded with someone at court, gained us pardons and positions. Masery and I asked no questions; we had learned not to question Stepmother She could be kind, but when the mood was on her, she could be cruel, too

"Perry, you will be a page, in training to be a knight, and Masery, a lady-in-waiting Walk with me. Let me give you one last blessing before you go "

We left the castle, walked beyond the battlements out to the road that led to southern settlements and into the forest where people went to cut wood. Although she was heavy with child, Stepmother walked quickly and well. She took the northern fork to the harbor, then branched away from the road on a narrow track that led to the top of a cliff overlooking the sea

We stood and looked out to sea. Clouds hung low over the long gray distances, but breaks in them flooded the sea with scatters of silvery sunlight Waves surged, grew whitecaps, wind blew spray up into the air The air was damp and smelled salty

I wondered when I would come home, and thought· I used to be homesick for our house near the king's castle, where life was easy and the food was rich and we had a garden where fruit trees grew and servants who smiled And yet, with all that Stepmother had taught me, I had learned to love this harsh land as well I could hit a flying duck with an arrow if luck was with me. and knock over a hare with a stone I knew the names of plants, which ones to eat, which to make into tinctures or ointments to cure ills. I knew a few words of the language of fire, I could coax a log to burn even after it had charred. I could translate some of the whispers in the walls of the keep. I had heard stones of others who had lived there ages earlier In the long, dark winter nights, I had learned a little of the language of snow, and heard tales of heaven the snowflakes whispered as they fell This place, too, was home

Stepmother brought out the silver wand of transformation Masery and I held hands and stood before Stepmother What would she turn us into? Would she make me stronger and Masery more beautiful so we would find favor in the eyes of our cousins at court? Could she give me the tongue of a diplomat, or Masery the skill of a musician? Perhaps she would transform our clothing so we would be more worthy of being seen in royal places. Since Stepmother's pregnancy, despite Masery's and my skill with the needle and other arts Stepmother had taught us, we had not been able to keep our clothes from wearing out, nor our hair from tangling

"Live your natures, my sometume children," whispered Stepmother She tapped me thnce with the wand

A horrible, strange thing happened Inside me something huge awoke and looked out through my stomach with burning orange eyes. It laughed, and the laugh came out of my throat; and then it crawled up out of my mouth, its head dark silver, spiky, and glistening I didn't know how it happened, but for a brief time I was still myself, staring at this worm as it poured out of my throat and mouth, only how could it come from inside me, when it was larger than I was? And then I looked through other eyes, and the body I had been growing into all my days melted into the scales and spines of the dragon

Stepmother tapped Masery thrice with her wand

A great silvery scaled snout stuck out below my eyes Long whiskery things trailed from it, waving with a life of their own I opened my mouth, and oh, it opened wider and wider I felt my own maw, gaping, a cut in my head that sliced back into my throat, reaching almost to my spine The tip of my new tongue flickered out. It was long and black, split at the tip like a snake s

I tasted a hundred things on the wind. coming snow, sea salt, crushed wet leaves that carpeted the forest floor behind us, wood smoke from the keep below, blood from the fall butchering of pigs, the cinnamon, musk, and amber scent of Stepmother. And something else, something new, an oily, fishy scent. I bent my heavy head and with one eye looked before me A large fish the size of a human child flopped on the rock, mouth gaping and closing

Fish—I was hungry; fires lit in my belly—and something more

The scent of Sister

A hiss poured out of my throat. Stepmother took two steps back and laughed. "Why, Perry, how fine you are, and how strange. I so expected a mouse!"

Fire roared up my throat. I closed my mouth a moment, gathered fire on my tongue, then opened my mouth to breathe on Stepmother

She held up the wand. "No!" she cried. "No!" She tapped me thrice with the wand. "Resistance, transform into obedience! Perry, you are mine now, mine! You will do my bidding. You will not hurt me!"

I felt invisible chains drop onto me, lock into my will. I swallowed my own fire

"You will do this work for me. Guard that tree." She pointed down the coast to where an ancient oak spread its branches. The tree was so old and so long settled that the sea had eaten inland to it; some of its roots stuck out of the low cliff it stood on and dangled toward the small crescent of beach below. "Live there. See that no one approaches it, kill any who dare. That's my good and noble Perry." She stroked my head.

How I longed to burn her hand with my skin! But she was unscathed, though I knew my body hosted heat inside and out

"As for you, Masery, this form too I didn't expect for you. I thought you might become a cat, and hoped I could take you home with me. But you can't be my pet, so get you gone Perry, toss her into the sea."

I could hardly understand what I had become, let alone that this giant fish was my sister. I didn't need to understand anything but Stepmother's orders, though. I reached out, saw my own dragon hand for the first time: fingers as long as my arms used to be, tipped with claws of dark jewel; a scaled palm engraved with the lines of folds. I grasped my sister gently, her scales to mine, and lifted her as carefully as I could, for within Stepmother's order there was this much flex, that I could choose my grip. I carried my sister to the edge of the cliff and threw her as far out to sea as I could, hoping and praying she would be able to breathe water now, and would know how to swim.

Then I turned away from Stepmother and walked on my new four feet, dragging my spiky tail, down the cliff path toward the tree she had told me to guard.

Stepmother laughed. "Good boy," she cried. I did not look back

I wrapped myself around the foot of the tree. The tree sang to me, a soothing, welcoming song whose words I did not yet understand, though I took their tone

Also, there was a scent from higher up. I could taste it: a cinnamon scent. Somewhere in the tree's crown was something that belonged to Stepmother

The tree had scattered acorns all around it. As a boy, I had never eaten them, but now I was so hungry. I decided to try. I could tell, when I had licked up a mouthful of gritty little orbs, that my teeth were not shaped to crunch such things, but I bit down on one anyway. Bitter filled my mouth. Fire shot up my throat and roasted the acorns on my tongue, and then, ah, then they fell apart and tasted better, a little like porridge, a little like roasted chestnuts. I roasted and ate many of them, then curled around the tree's foot

The night was cold, but I did not feel it, I only knew because with every breath I breathed out, steam rose from my nostrils. I slept before the moon rose.

In the morning I felt stiff with cold—not as though I were freezing, more as though my body had begun turning to stone. I was flexing muscles I did not know from my previous life—how many ribs did I have? The tail moved when I wanted it to, but how could that work? How did I know how to make my tail behave? Did my fingers really have extra joints, and how was it that I had muscles in my nose that could send my new whiskers twitching?— I noticed people across the way, creeping through the forest's fringe

"Hey." I called. Was that the baker's son Fon? The miller's daughter Kiki?

"Fon, Kiki," I cried. "Halloo!"

Only, what erupted from my throat was a fountain of flame, and my voice came out a growl

Both of them screamed and ran away

Oh, dear

And yet, now I was warm again. I stretched, shifted, and flamed. Warmth settled into my belly, and all my muscles moved as though oiled

My stomach growled, and small flames puffed from my mouth. I searched the ground for acorns and realized I'd eaten all the nearby ones the night before. I cast farther afield

To one side of my tree was the low cliff that dropped away to the ocean. Waves fretted its base only ten feet below. I peered over the edge but saw only very shallow water, nothing to eat. I turned toward the forest instead

Some of those trees were oaks. I left my post and ambled over, filled my mouth with acorns, roasted, crunched, and swallowed them. A hare startled as I approached a bush, and I was so surprised I opened my mouth and flamed it. Ah, the scent of charred hare. Delicious. I ran to it and ate it. Caught, killed, cooked in one move. For the first time, I was happy about one of my new abilities. I wanted to hunt again, but the rumbles in my belly had quieted, and the tree called me back

I made a ring around its base with my body and lay, looking out to sea.

I discovered my new life: the tree called me to lie near it. Only when hunger overpowered me could I leave the tree. The farther I went from it, the worse I felt. Once in a while, when the tide was high, I could lean down into the water and snatch unwary fish, sometimes I steamed them with my breath until they floated to the surface, and then they were easy to catch

Four days after my transformation, Masery came ashore

She was a bigger fish than any I'd seen so close to the cliff. At first, when I sensed her, that flickering movement unexplained by water's workings, I was excited, hunger always lay in the back of my throat, and I was ready to eat again. Then I sensed the Sister in her and waited. I had thought of her now and again during my vigil by the tree, wondered if she had survived her transformation and my treatment of her afterward, the far toss into rough waters

She swam right up until she had beached herself. I watched in alarm, wondering if she was killing herself, wondering whether to reach down and flip her back into the water. Her scent changed, though, and then she also changed. She shapeshifted back into her human self, naked, shivering, her hair a tangled mess. Gasping, she sat up, then stood. She faced me, took a staggering step back. "Brother?" she whispered.

Masery, I thought. I was afraid to speak. I remembered how I had tried to speak to Fon and Kiki, only to flame at them.

"Is it really you?" She crept closer. "Brother?"

I lowered my head and looked away. In the first days of my enchantment I had not thought much about my appearance, only tried out my new body and wondered how I could change back into myself. Did I really want to, now that Stepmother openly hated me? Father had not been home in months. What did I have to go back to? Masery and I had a few friends in the village, the children we had sometimes snuck out to meet when Stepmother was brooding over her spellbooks. I had tried to greet them, and look what had happened. What else was there for me but to guard this tree and hunt?

"Brother," said Masery. She stood at the base of the low cliff and

raised her arms. "Lift me up."

How brave, my sister, to face a dragony worm like me. I reached down and wrapped my hands around her waist, lifted her up and set her beside me.

"Oh," she said. "You're warm." She leaned against my flank.

I turned away. "Masery." I tried to say. A hiss and a small flame.

"You can't speak? How little she's left you! Brother, dearest brother." She stroked my eyebrow whiskers. "I managed at the last a tiny guarding spell while she was tapping your shoulder and before she tapped mine, so I have my own form one day a week. I don't know how to counteract the fortunes she's given us, though." She sat beside me, leaned against me, hugged me, though my spines probably prickled. "Stay here. I'm going home to see what I can steal."

"Masery!" I spoke flames.

She patted my shoulder. "Don't worry. I'll use stealth spells. I just want clothing, and something for your hair. I'll visit the kitchen, too." She ran away and left me to worry.

She returned when the sun was halfway down the sky. She wore her gardening dress, a soiled mustard shift, and carried two bundles. The greasy one smelled wonderful.

"Here." She opened that one, and brought out three whole roasted chickens. "Poor cook. She couldn't see me, but she saw that they were gone. Such a shriek she raised!" She set them on the ground in front of me. I took each into my mouth, chewed it to shreds, bones and all, roasted it a little further and swallowed with great gulps that wagged my head up and down.

Masery watched me with interest but no fear. I wasn't sure I could have been so calm in her place, watching a dragon bolt his meat.

When I finished eating, Masery opened the other bundle. "Here's your flute, Perry. I know you can't play the way you are now, but I didn't want to leave it for that child Stepmother will have. Here's my favorite necklace, from Mother, and some of my clothes. I don't need them while I'm a fish, but I want to visit you every week when I have my own form, so I'm going to hide them in the tree. You have to guard the tree, yes? A nod I can understand."

I nodded.

"I wonder why," said Masery.

I liked the tree. It whispered stories into my dreams, the deeds of kings and queens and princes and princesses, sorcerers and witless virgin maidens, brave knights and cowardly jesters, talking animals and walking plants. Why did the tree know stories of men? Why did the tree choose to share them with me? I had no idea, but it made the solitude less onerous. I knew that something caught high in the tree's branches smelled of Stepmother, too, but I didn't know how to tell Masery that.

"Maybe she just wanted you away from the house, but I suspect her of different motives. She could have ordered you to go far from our keep. Stepmother always has her reasons. Anyway, at least I know where to find you. And now, for your hair."

I was surprised to learn I even had hair. I had never gotten a good look at my new self, other than my tail and hindquarters, which I could see by curling my long, snaky neck, and my front claws I could also see my snout, with its bristling, whiskery, scaly things, thicker than hair as I knew it. I could sense things through the whiskers—movement in the air, changes in the weather, a few things I didn't yet understand.

But hair? With these scales?

Masery took a silver comb from her bundle. "Put your head down."

I laid my long, long chin on the backs of my hands and closed my eyes. Masery stroked my head. "Oh, Perry, you have tiny jewels all over you. You're beautiful!"

My ears twitched, and she stroked them. I couldn't tell what they looked like, but they felt quite different from my human ears—longer, more mobile, directional. I could open my ears, angle them, swivel them, I could aim my hearing in a way I hadn't been able to before, and hear noises I had never imagined. Skyward, the zooms and buzzes of even the tiniest bugs flying past; seaward, under the surface of water rushing, the hiss of sand sliding over itself; toward the forest, the slither of leaves touching other leaves. The languages I had started to learn in human form—fire, snow, the past—those I heard better than I had, but I couldn't yet translate new words in fire and snow. My tree: its words were clear. Maybe all trees talked, and my hearing had just been inadequate before. Next time I went hunting, I would—

Masery's comb stroked something at the top of my head, and I fell into bliss, the perfect bliss of having an itch scratched just hard enough and long enough to satisfy its calling. The teeth of the comb stroked across the top of my head. I moaned in delight. Tiny puffs of smoke rose from my mouth.

Masery combed my hair and whispered, "Never forget who we are, Brother. Never forget, no matter how deep you sink into your animal. Never forget who we are."

With each stroke, she woke another memory: our real mother, when we still lived at court, dressing us both for presentation to the king, giving me a peppermint drop to quiet me as she combed some nasty tangles from my hair; Masery standing by, six years old and already groomed, beautiful in dark blue velvet, with tiny pearls around her neck, her hair in curls. Father, taking us each up before him on his horse and riding us around the meadow at home in the south. How the horse bumped between my legs, until Father taught me how to rise with its rhythm. He set my hands on the reins, though he still kept hold of them, and I stopped being afraid. I would fall and began to learn how to talk to the horse with nudges and tugs. Cook giving us hot biscuits and butter on a cold winter morning.

Masery let down a bucket into the ocean and pulled up water, and she washed my head. It hadn't occurred to me to wash since I gained my new form. Masery's gentle ablutions brought me strange comfort. Perhaps I was worth caring about and keeping clean, even though I had lost my human body. I remembered baths in front of the fire in winter, emptying ewers of steaming water into the copper tub to mix with the cold water already there, how I had to climb in and work my arms and legs to get a true mix of hot and cold so the water would be warm all through.

I didn't need the seawater to be warm, it warmed as it met my hot skin. Masery's touch felt gentle and soothing.

"Perry," Masery said, when I was truly and happily trapped in memories of my human self, "I have to go now. I'll return next week. Guard my things for me." She undressed, closed the comb and my flute and her dress into the bundle, and climbed up the tree to lodge the bundle and the bucket in the lower branches. She kissed my cheek and dived over the cliff. I scuttled forward and watched as she silvered and sleekened and swam away, a fish once more.

Three chickens kept me fed more than a day. I lay under the tree and digested, listening to the tree's whispered tales and watching.

A few days later, a knight rode along the cliff path toward me. He had a lance. I had never seen him before. Who was he, and where was he going? Was he a traveler? Why follow the cliff path? Was he heading for the next village along the coast? Why carry a lance all that way? How useful was it unless you were going to tourney?

"Hail, loathsome worm," he cried when he was still fifty feet away. He held his reins tight, for his horse pranced and sweated beneath him, its nostrils flaring wide. "I have come to slay you!"

I had been dreaming of history lessons with our old tutor before we had to leave court. Masery, the tutor, and I sat before a fire in

the nursery at the old house. Our tutor had drawn pictures to illustrate the lessons. His hand was deft, whether he drew griffins kings, or cats. It took me a moment to shake myself free of memory and realize that this knight was speaking to me.

"Don't." I cried. "Leave me alone. I have never harmed a human."

With those words, I made myself a liar, for instead of sound flame shot from my mouth, and when the flame touched the horse, it bucked the knight off and fled.

The knight lay on his back on the ground, the lance broken beneath him. Then he struggled to his feet. One of his arms dangled useless at his side. He groaned. I smelled his fear and pain, a sour, bitter scent mixed with blood. He unbuckled his sword so he could draw it with the wrong hand. "Wicked, vile creature," he said. "I will rid the Earth of you."

Then I lost all the human I had ever been, and turned wholly into my dragon self, and I made a liar of the knight. Flame roared out of me, roasted him in his armor, dropped him smoking and screaming to the ground. I ran to him, my scales impervious to my own fire, and stamped on his head, crushing it.

Later, I woke and saw what I had done. I loathed myself and lay, sickened, at the foot of my tree. I had just killed a hero. Every story the tree had told me ended with the hero triumphing over the dragon or the witch or the sorcerer, winning the fair maiden, riding into a happy future. I was the wicked dragon, and I had won. This was wrong.

How could I kill someone and stay right with myself? I wanted to die.

The stink of the cooked knight tainted the air until finally I went into the forest, dug a hole—my claws proved strangely suited to such a task—and dropped him in. I buried him deep and covered him over and scratched a cross into the earth above him. Then I slunk back to my tree.

Sleep was a long time coming. My stomach was so soured with disgust that it kept speaking to me in grumbles and small gouts of flame. Finally I calmed enough to listen to my tree, and it told me a different sort of story, of a brave young dragon fighting for its life against a monstrous knight, emerging victorious.

When I woke I was still heartsick, but I felt better. The tree told me more stories where the dragon was the hero, and gradually I let loose of fretting about my evil deed.

Masery came again the next week. I wanted to tell her everything, but I still had no speech but a nod or flame. She dressed and snuck off to the castle and brought me back a slab of beef which I cooked in my own flame and ate. Then she combed my hair and washed my head, and I remembered all the best things about our life before. She told me nothing of her own life under the water, though I longed to know. She left around sunset.

So the tenor of my days was set. I guarded my tree, waited for Masery's return, and hunted a little farther afield each day. Knights came, one after another, and I forgot I was human and killed them. I always remembered I was human afterward, and gave them as decent a burial as I could. I wished I could speak to them, though, ask them why they came to kill me, who had sent them here so far from normal routes, who they were.

After I killed the sixth knight, I tried to frame speech with my mouth, tried to wake my throat into voice. The tree listened as I shaped hisses into whispers, searched and found words. The next knight I would challenge with speech before he attacked. The work of calling back words occupied my days.

When Masery came that week, I whispered her name.

"Perry! You can speak! How wonderful!" She hugged my head. "Masery. I've killed six knights."

She drew back and looked at me. She walked a little ways away. I thought: Now I've lost her. She'll never speak to me again. I wondered how I could kill myself. Bash my head into my oak? Leap from a higher cliff to crash to the rocks below? Starve myself?

Masery returned. "What happened?" she asked.

I told her about the first knight, how I spooked his horse, how he came at me with a sword and I roasted him. I told her of the others, who had also refused to run away, though I showed the later ones I could flame things before I actually aimed my flame at them. I tried to frighten them off. I tried to gesture at them to run away. They only drew their swords and came at me, screaming, and then then I killed them. And was sick afterward.

He came at me then, and, as I had learned from past knights, I released my human self and let myself become wholly dragon.

Masery combed my hair and washed my head, and I remembered being human. The images were smaller now, dimmer, veiled in a shimmer of flame. She whispered to me. "You only did what you had to, Brother. They came to fight you. You gave them what they desired."

That day, she did not kiss me before she left.

The seventh knight stopped to listen to my challenge. "I don't wish to harm you," I said. "Please go back."

"You speak with the devil's tongue, tempting me to abandon my quest! Have at you!" he cried, and charged me. His horse was better disciplined than the others' had been, and did not bolt at the first touch of flame. I didn't want to hurt a blameless creature. I flamed his feet. When the hair burned on his hide—I smelled the peculiar pungency of singeing hair—he rose up, cast his knight to the ground, and ran away. This knight landed on his feet somehow, perhaps because his armor was lighter than the others', and drew his sword.

"Won't you save me from having to kill you?" I said.

"They call me coward, back home. I'm going to prove them wrong. Don't speak to me again."

"At least tell me your name so I will know what to scratch on your grave."

"Silence, worm!"

He came at me then, and, as I had learned from past knights, I released my human self and let myself become wholly dragon. The dragon raged with flame, toasted the knight. The knight broke through the first wall of flame and hacked at the dragon's neck, scoring a long, shallow wound, and that threw the dragon into a frenzy. He flamed and flamed.

"Wait," cried the knight at last, reduced to a burned heap on the ground, his sword long fallen from his hand, his shield flaming on the ground a distance away from him, his armor burning him from the heat it had absorbed. "Wait," he said, though he was so badly injured he could not have survived even if given mercy.

The dragon did not listen, though somewhere inside it, I heard and tried to stop us. The dragon breathed out a long stream of flame that burned the features off the knight's face. A last scream,

cut off when his throat was no longer whole. The dragon stomped the dead knight, the only one who had actually cut us. There was not much left for me to bury.

The eighth knight was my father.

He dismounted and tied his horse to a tree in the forest's fringe. Perhaps he had learned from all the other horses I had sent running. He approached me, wary of the char marks on the ground. He steeled himself and walked forward to come face to face with me.

"Now I find you here, on my lands, you stinking worm," he cried, "and hear about the devastation you've wreaked in my absence! You pestilence! You blight on a fair country! You killer of the king's champions! Now it's time for you to die." He drew his sword.

"Father," I said.

He staggered back, then righted himself.

I laid my head on my claws. "Father," I whispered. "I never meant to kill the others. They would not stop. They would not listen. At the last I couldn't help myself. Wouldn't you fight back too, if someone stabbed you?" My voice was full of hisses and smoke, and yet, the words were clear enough to halt my father.

"Who are you, worm, who claim my paternity?" he cried.

"I'm Perry. Peregrine of Hopelost. Your son. Stepmother enchanted me and Masery while you were gone. She wanted us out of the way once she got with child. Father."

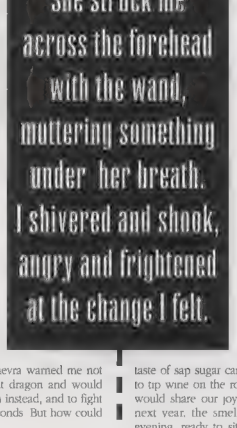
He did not speak for a moment, and then he swayed. He pushed up his helm and rubbed his face with the back of his gloved hand. "Is it the devil who speaks to me?" he asked.

"Father. Please, Father."

"Perry?" He fell to his knees in a clatter of armor before me. "I knew I stayed away from home too long, but after all, there were reivers at Hidden Cove, and we had to fight off the first wave, and guard against the next two, and Genevra sent no word of trouble, we had no reason to hasten our return. I came home yesterday to find you gone. She said she'd sent you to foster at court. And all the village was full of the news of this dragon haunting the coast, and how knights had been sent for, and how all had been vanquished, or so it was thought, only their horses returned. Genevra warned me not to come here. She said you were a puissant dragon and would only kill me. She begged me to send my men instead, and to fight you with spears and arrows tipped with diamonds. But how could I honorably do that? Perry."

I turned to look at him. He stared into my eyes, his brow furrowed. "Are you in truth my son, or is this just another of evil's tricks?"

"Father," I laid my head down again and closed my eyes. "Kill me if you must. I will strive not to fight you. If you can, ask the villagers not to fish in the harbor. Masery was transformed into the mackerel of the sea, save for one afternoon a week, when she visits me as herself. If that will prove anything to you, come back on Saturday and see. But whatever you do, beware of Stepmother. Don't let her know you've spoken with me. She has her own son now, and perhaps she needs you no longer." Masery, during one of her weekly forays to the keep, had heard the news about our little half-brother. A fine boy, they all said.


She struck me across the forehead with the wand, muttering something under her breath. I shivered and shook, angry and frightened at the change I felt.

Father leaned on his sword as he climbed to his feet. "I will think on all these things." He scrubbed his gloved hand over his face once more. "I am so weary of battle." He turned and marched back to his horse, led it to a fallen tree and mounted. He rode away.

The next day a lad from the keep castle rode out on a sturdy pony and tossed a burlap sack in my direction, then rode off in a hurry before I could respond. I crept to the sack and clawed it open. I knew before I opened it that inside lay something delicious. The smoked haunch of a pig, as fine as anything Masery had brought me. I ate and was content.

The following day the same lad threw me another sack with roasted chickens in it, and the day after that, a beef roast.

The day after that was Saturday. Masery came up out of the water and dressed herself, as she always did, then pulled out her comb and the bucket and set to grooming me. "Perry, Perry," she said. "What was your week like?"

"Father has returned," I said.

She sat up straight, comb in hand. "Has he?"

"He came to kill me, but I spoke and he left. I told him about your visits. Sister, what was your week like?" I had asked her every week since I found words again, and she had always shrugged and said she was as happy as she could be, considering everything.

"Well," she said, "I got married."

I lifted my head and turned so I could see her with both eyes. "Who—whom did you marry, Sister mine?"

"His name is Silverthin, and he is a prince under the waters. I had to tell you, Perry, because I don't know how long I'll be able to visit you anymore. Silverthin has a witch in his court who can make my transformation permanent. Silverthin worries about me because I worry so much about you." She leaned against my side.

"Father has been feeding me," I said. "Perhaps you no longer need to worry about me."

"I worry about you forgetting who you are."

Maybe it would be better if I did. Maybe it would be better if I lost my human side. Then when some knight comes to kill me and succeeds, I won't even care."

"Don't say that." She combed my hair, combed memories back into my mind, the taste of sap sugar candy at the harvest fair, the day I was allowed to tip wine on the roots of the apple trees in the orchard so they would share our joy at the season and bring us a good harvest next year, the smell of wax as we lit the first candles of the evening, ready to sit at Mother's feet while she read to us after supper. "Never forgot who you are," Masery sang softly to me. "Never forget."

But she was going to forget. She was going to let a witch turn her into her new self and leave her that way. Why should I remember any longer? What did I have to look forward to if my sister no longer came?

I heard clanking and smell-tasted the scent of smoke and marsh and sweat that was my father. Masery leapt up. I closed a claw around her ankle. "It may be your last chance to speak with him," I said. "Please wait."

Father came into the clearing, bareheaded but otherwise locked into armor. "Masery," he said, and ran to us. "Masery!"

My sister kicked free of my grasp, dropped her comb and bucket, and dived over the cliff into the sea. Father rushed to the cliff and looked for her, and I followed. Her dress floated, empty, on the surge of the tide. Of her, there was only a silver flicker under the surface, beyond where the waves broke. She was gone.

Father dropped beside me, groaning. "Why did she run?" he asked.

"I don't know. She's found a love under the sea. She came to tell me today that she probably won't be back."

He took the comb Masery had used on my hair and held it in both hands, lifted it to his nose, and smelled it. Could he smell her on it? More likely me, smoke and the clean dirt I slept in and lay in, bitter oak for the one that spoke stories in my dreams and dropped acorns and leaves on me.

Perry," he said at last. "I believe you now. I'm going to speak to my wife."

"Take care, Father. Don't let her harm you."

He nodded. "I've been a warrior a long time, my son," he said, "and I am not without powers of my own." He rose, left. I should go with him, I thought. I was stronger as my dragon self than I had been as a boy. Maybe I could protect him.

But then I remembered the further transformation Stepmother had made in me: she had made me obedient to her will. Ordered me to stay with the tree. Suppose I fought off that compulsion and went back with Father. Suppose she ordered me to attack him? Made me kill my own father?

I spent another night under my tree, listening to stories of home-coming heroes. In my drowsy state I did not notice whether they were knights or dragons.

The next morning, Father returned with Stepmother in his grip. Her hair was disheveled, her gown smudged. "Now, woman," Father said to her, bringing her face to face with me. "Undo what you've done to my boy." He pushed her from him, and she stumbled forward, then caught her balance and stopped.

"Ah, Perry, how fine you've grown. Being a dragon suits you." She smiled at me. Then she straightened and pulled her silver wand out of her sleeve. "But your father wants you back as a boy. I'm sorry. I hope you don't mind." She struck me three times across the forehead with the wand, muttering something under her breath. I shivered and shook, angry and frightened at the change I felt. I opened my mouth, ready to pour forth flame, but what came out of me was a muscle-armed man, his hair glossy and wet. I coughed and choked on him and then it happened again. I melted, all the dragon, jeweled length of me, into this shape that had emerged from me. There was a sense of being two shapes at once, jangling, jarring, wrong, and then an easing as I lost my dragon self. I stood up, clutched my head in my hands.

My father took off his cloak and wrapped me in it. After a moment, my stomach and my vision steadied. I tried to find myself again, but half the sounds and most of the smells had faded. I felt as though I floated in some strange bath of air that had washed away the real world.

"No harm done," said Stepmother. "See how he's grown into a fine young man!"

"Now get me back my daughter," said Father.

"Of course, of course." She went to stand at the cliff's edge, and raised a tiny silver horn to her lips and blew.

I didn't hear a sound, but I felt as though I would have with my dragon ears. My human ears didn't swivel. I felt deprived. Father and I stood beside Stepmother and looked out to sea. Soon the water turned silver with the arrival of fish, schooling so thickly one could have walked out to sea on their backs and not gotten one's feet wet. "Masery? Where is Masery?" Stepmother asked the fish. We both stared at all the fish, looking for my sister.

"Here," called a fish some distance out.

"Come closer," said Stepmother, "or I won't be able to change you back."

"You shaped me once, Stepmother, but never again will I let you do that. Leave me be."

"Masery, are you sure?" Father called.

"She has cast this grief upon me. Consider me dead to you, and blame her for it, Father," she called, and swam away. All the other fish swam away too.

"I did my best, Kendrick," said Stepmother. "You saw. She is willful and won't come home. But you have your son again. Isn't that enough?"

"No, Genevra, it is not enough. You need to suffer the way my children have." He took the wand from her and bound her hands behind her and led her toward the woods.

"Kendrick," she whimpered. "I am your son's mother."

"That's not enough to excuse your crimes. I've raised motherless children before," said Father, and then they had gone so far I didn't hear them any longer.

But you haven't, I thought. We were only motherless a year before you brought Stepmother home.

Everything had changed. I leaned against the oak and looked. My eyes were farther from the ground now, my ears and nose less sensitive. I tried to summon up my internal fire, and coughed. Only noise came out of my mouth. Could I be happy in this shape? Even the oak had gone dumb; the whisper of breeze in its leaves no longer made words for me.

Well, there was one thing I had wanted to do as a dragon that I couldn't manage. I could no longer smell the cinnamon scent that had told me night and day something of Stepmother's was up in the tree, but now I could climb. So I did. I shed Father's cloak and climbed up the tree, higher and higher, until the branches were slender and wouldn't support my weight. I wished again I could smell with the sensitive up of my tongue, that wash of information from the air into my mouth and then my brain, but I couldn't. I searched through the tree's crown with just my hands, which were soon scratched and bleeding. How could anything be hidden up here? Maybe I had dreamed it.

But then I found it, tucked into a crotch of the tree, the branches almost grown over it: a small wooden box with ivory inlay in the shape of lilies on its top. I tugged at it. At first I thought the tree had grown too tightly around it to release, but then something shivered in the tree; I felt it in the bark against the soles of my feet, in my arms where I leaned against branches, in the air. The tree moved just enough to loose the box into my hand.

Somewhere in the distance the sound of crackling, burning. A shriek, and then a scream. Then another.

I climbed carefully down, the box in one hand. When I reached the ground, I sat on my father's cloak and opened the box. Inside was something black, repellent, and shriveled. I clapped the lid closed again. I couldn't look at the contents of the box without feeling sick to my stomach.

Screams from the forest, the scent of smoke, meat cooking. The same meat I had cooked in its own armor when I defeated the knights. "No, Kendrick, no," screamed Stepmother, and then a howl of anguish.

I flinched, though I had known without knowing what my father must be doing.

He doesn't even know what her real crime is, I thought. I wished I could warm myself with my own fire again, and listen to tree tales through the long winter night. She had given me that and taken it away.

I opened the box that held my stepmother's heart. As long as her heart was safe, she couldn't perish. She must be screaming just for show.

I closed my fist around my stepmother's heart and squeezed. ❧

Split Infinities

BY JANE FRANK

Mention the names of the best-known fantasists of the century—Lord Dunsany, George Orwell, Lester del Rey, or Cordwainer Smith and the hard science fiction fans may be able to whisper their true given names: Stephen King, William A.P. White, Edward John Plunkett, Eric Arthur Blair, Leonard Kaslan, Dr. Paul Myron Anthony Linebarger. The [illegible] (or [illegible] [illegible]) in the field of literature are considered out of the ordinary.

Switch the focus to illustration, [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] you will find that the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

AND A NOVEL DIMENSION

TO HIS PROFESSION

BY INVENTING AN

Edward Miller

"Edward Miller came into being a few years ago," says Les Edwards, without a shred of self-consciousness, "at a lunchtime meeting with my agent at the time. We were discussing the difficulty in persuading clients to view me as anything other than a "horror artist." We wondered "what would happen if (a) I started to do work in a completely different style and (b) we pretended that it was done by a different artist. Someone 'conjured the name out of thin air and "

What happened next was anything but magical. Miller started getting work, and pretty soon people were starting to ask for Edward, specifically, to create art for their book covers. Says publisher William Shafer, (Subterranean Press), "I first ran across Edward Miller's work on the cover to China Miéville's gorgeous *Perdido Street Station*.... No one is better at depicting the wonder and terror of the best dark fantasy. His best work [is] landscapes where the sense of decayed romance is essential."

This quote is amusing because historically, no one has been better at "dark fantasy" than Les Edwards, but the kudos are for depicting landscapes that he never could have painted without Miller!

Indeed, "the whole point of Ed," says Les, "was that he came without any of the baggage attached to the name of Les Edwards. Les had a certain, if defined, reputation and clients had certain expectations. Ed was a clean slate, so to speak, and so could work without being pigeonholed into being a 'genre artist.' Yet, and ironically, Edward has gradually turned more toward fantasy work (Les's forte[2]) while Les has been doing more and more work in nonfantasy areas, so things have switched 'round in an unexpected way."

The unexpected, of course, is exactly what *can* be expected when an artist splits himself into two creative entities. Life can become very complicated ... at times, surreal. What do you do when fans ask for Edward Miller's autograph? How far should one go in maintaining the fiction? What's to prevent artists from creating as many identities as they like?

Val Edwards (his wife and agent) treats the matter straightforwardly and apportions the work fairly equally between Les and Ed. Generally, the feedback has been very positive. She says, "Clients usually ask directly for either Les or Edward, and confusion is rare." Indeed

Cover painting for *The Skies of Pern* by Anne McCaffrey.

there has only been one case, Val reports, where a client changed their mind halfway through a job and switched artists (!) so that what began as an Edward Miller painting became a painting by Les. There is also the occasional client who simply cannot understand how one artist can have two different styles. Les responds, "It's all painting"—and he's probably right, because it doesn't seem to be a major leap for many artists to work in different styles, depending on the job, the client, and the intended audience. What is different here, however, is that it took the birth of Edward to free Les, so that he could pursue new artistic avenues.

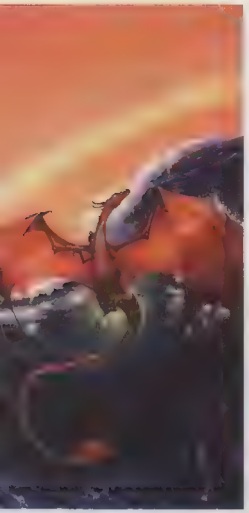
Cover painting for Wizard Books' *Cathrenai*, by Les Edwards.

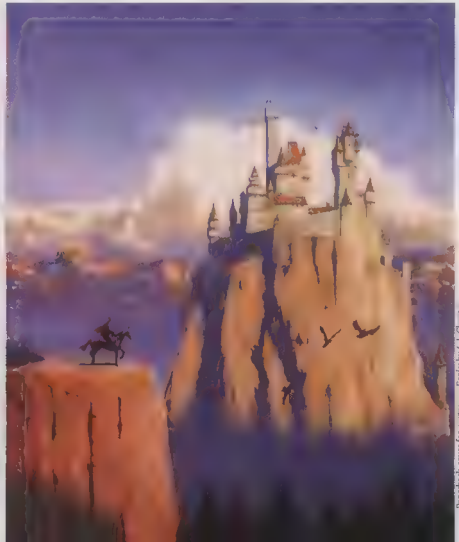
For Edwards, working under a pseudonym has been "quite liberating . . . you are suddenly free." He adds "I suppose life would be simpler without Ed, but in an odd way, having another creative outlet has given me new enthusiasm for doing work as Les Edwards—I'm doing my best stuff as Les at the moment and I'm sure that this is somehow being fed by having the different principles and aims of Edward Miller's work filtering through."

And here is where you start down that slippery slope into the surreal. For, if you engage Les in conversation, it doesn't take long for you to grasp that Les thinks of Ed as quite a separate entity, with his own signature, his own work habits and his own artistic influences. And, judging from the reviews, Ed is giving Les a run for his money!

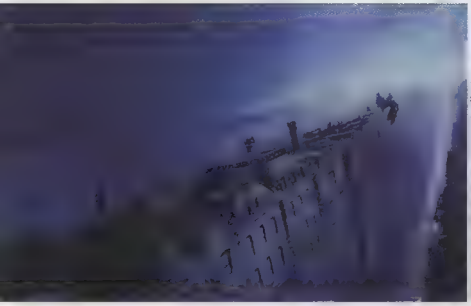
Stephen Jones, World Fantasy Award-winning editor, writes, "Edward Miller has a style all of his own. No other illustrator has so rapidly and so assuredly risen to the forefront of professional artists." Jo Fletcher, editorial director for Victor Gollancz (a well-known UK publisher) and winner of the World Fantasy Award and British Fantasy Award, said, "Edward Miller is one of the most evocative artists working today. We are extremely lucky to have covers of such stunning technique and composition." And author Paul Di Filippo noted, "I've never been happier with a cover than I was with the one Edward Miller did for my novella *A Year in the Linear City*. Miller's work is both masterfully ancient and daringly modern."

Clues to Miller's distinctively different "visual signature" are captured by Art Director Irene Gallo's description of the paintings the artist produced for Jack's Whyte's Arthurian series, *The Camulod Chronicles* (Tor/Forge). "Because Miller avoids being bogged down in detail he creates a real feeling of another time, of legend . . . you are free to lose yourself in a mythical landscape.... Miller's space is ethereal—a time and place you can only dream about." Simon





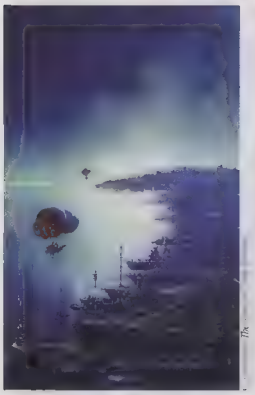
Paperback cover for *Fortress*, by Les Edwards.



Spanton (Editorial Director, Gollancz Publishers) sums up these sentiments when he writes, "He is a master at providing atmosphere in a picture."

But Edwards views the matter through a different lens. "Les has spent 54 years acquiring influences by slow accretion. Edward, on the other hand, was created from scratch in a relatively short time, so I was much more aware of what was going into the mix ... having spent most of my working life painting in a particular way, it needed a conscious effort to make it different."

Striving for differentiation while simultaneously producing images like *Exorcising Angels* that, in the words of Paul Miller (publisher, Earthling Publications), were "masterful and captured the essence of the story dead on," is not an easy task. But Les's goals are clear when he says, "What I enjoy about



Ed is that he's a mile away from that kind of over-slick, over-processed, mostly airbrushed stuff that is so desperately dull it makes my teeth ache.

Perhaps the essence of their creative split lies in their very different approaches to creating art. "Les's pictures are more planned and deliberate in execution, where Ed's paintings are more inspirational." Quite often, Les says, "Ed doesn't know what the painting is going to be when he starts with the first marks, while Les has worked things out beforehand, so they definitely have different mind-sets. It would be difficult," he confides, "to be both Les and Ed on the same day."

At first, the concept of different personas is difficult to accept. We are tempted to smile when Les says, "I still think of Edward as the junior partner," but I've a feeling Ed may eventually outstrip his older sibling." Could he be right?

There's no denying Edward's rapid acceptance and success in a marketplace that, as Peter Crowther (author and owner/managing editor of the multiple award-winning specialty press, PS Publishing) notes, is distinguished by an abundance of "stereotypes and clichés." He goes on to say, "Nowhere is the temptation to take the easy route more apparent than on the myriad book covers that grace (or blight, depending on one's point of view) the SF, fantasy and horror sections of our favorite book stores. But the work of one artist shines out as being consistently striking and always innovative: that artist is Edward Miller."

But not so fast! Anne McCaffrey, noted fantasy author, tells the story of how Les Edwards' cover was chosen when there was "a problem deciding which cover people would buy when *Skies of Pern* came out in the USA (2001). Del Rey had decided to make it a 'big book' with a 'big book cover which was classy but absolutely dull. I didn't like it and told my American editor so. I put both the UK (Transworld) and the proposed American cover on my Web site and most people picked the Les Edwards UK cover. I suggested to Del Rey that they use the Edwards cover .. to come up with a properly draconic cover, which they did. The big wave, with the vivid asteroid seen behind it, was splendid."

So, will there be more pseudonyms in Edwards' future? "I'm not sure I could manage another personality," he says (we can see the twinkle in his eye when we read this). "Two seems enough for now—but I'd never discount anything. As long as I'm working professionally I'll keep both identities going ... and when I retire—that increasingly far off day—then I'll abandon the fiction of Edward Miller because I'll just be able to paint what I like, in whatever style I like. Unless Miller, Hyde-like, has taken over entirely!" ❧

BY DEVON MONK
ILLUSTRATION BY MATT HUGHES

FALLING WITH *Wings*

[illegible] BUT SOMETIMES [illegible] US.

eldest uncle, Setham, and he usually had to dig for the babies, but when he found me I was mostly on top of the muck and staring up at the sky from where I'd fallen. He said I never cried.

[illegible] they'd said, "one of us now."

the Dawn

the heaps of junk below.

When I was old enough, I asked Setham why he cleaned me up like that, and he said with a face so straight you [illegible] sense of sweetness for a second.

His smile flashed, was gone again. "Got it too."

Then he went off to the birthing soils, walking all day

[illegible] out of the mines.

Doesn't always go that way. Sometimes the boys get into the raising, and the girls get into the hunting. Sometimes the boys fall into scorpion holes, or rats chew them apart. Sometimes the girls die of the fever that comes from handling the babes and not staying clean enough.

I am fifteen now, and I raise the babes and teach the old songs. Not the songs that drift down on a good wind from the sky above the brown clouds. I teach the old songs, songs whispered from lips to ears by uncles and aunts who long ago climbed Mount Discard, spread their shuddering new wings, and vaulted up to the skyworld to see if the sky was any different on the other side.

I teach songs of patience, of pain. Of mud and toxweed milk and hunger and sharp things waiting just below the soft of the world.

Songs about the summer flower you ache to smell, but burns you blind if you get too close, the spring and autumn storms and the wild winter dogs that tear out baby hearts and crush bone and skull.

I teach the real songs. Dirt songs.

Sometimes, I imagine my aunts and uncles gone to wing sing down to me in the night to call me up. It is a childish thought, to wish those with wings would remember their birthing soil, would remember the songs they taught, or the babes they raised.

Fifteen, and I am the oldest girl.

Bell, who was three years older than me, walked to Mount Discard today. We waited at the flat beyond the blocks, the babies at our feet fussing some, playing some, while Bell walked to the mountain. Took her most of an hour to get there, and another hour to scramble up to the flat wedge of metal that crowns the mountaintop. She didn't wait, didn't wave. She just ran and jumped off the mountain. Fell so fast, my heart stopped beating to see her drop. Setham was next to me, and I saw his wingless back stiffen, his hands curl into fists, as if it was his fault she hadn't lifted up to the sky.

Ten year-old Jarn, who was Bell's favorite nephew, said, "No."

I took Jarn's hand in my own, felt how little and cold it was.

We waited while our hearts beat. No flutter of wings. No stir in the distant air. Bell had fallen below our line of sight. Had broken herself, was probably dead.

Reez, who is nearly fifteen, spat. "Stupid. She should have practiced more." Reez never smiled unless he was killing rats. He smiled now. "I get her wings."

"No!" Jarn screamed.

"Wait," Setham said, his gaze still locked on the foot of Mount Discard.

Reez scowled. We waited. The babies sitting at our feet or tied to our chests made baby sounds—oblivious to Reez's anger, Setham's focus, or Bell's fall.

"Stupid," Reez said again, this time looking straight at Setham who would not look away from Mount Discard.

"There," Setham said.

Bell beat her way up from the bold of the earth, her wings crooked and out of rhythm, her head bent down to her chest, her arms tight against her ribs, as if every ounce of thought, every bit of her strength was in her wings, pumping her up the slippery sky.

"Go," Jarn said. "Fly!"

We watched until she was swallowed by the greasy brown clouds.

"Patience," Setham said, leveling such a look at Reez, "isn't stupid."

"You should know," Reez said.

"If I had not been patient, you would not be here." Setham's voice was low and quiet and stronger than a yell.

And Reez knew that. He'd asked Setham to tell him the story of his birth find over and over again. How Reez had landed deep in the muck. How Setham dug harder and faster than ever before. How the muck was so wet, the hole kept filling in. How, finally, he had pulled Reez out, bruised and cut, his baby eyes swollen shut and blood coming out of his ears. That Reez survived because he was strong.

Usually the story put Reez in his place, reminded him who he was in our family. Not today. Reez started pacing, like he couldn't hold still, like he didn't want either foot to be on the ground for too long.

I let Jarn lean against me and put my arm over his thin shoulders.

"You know what I saw today?" Reez said.

The other children, most just babies except for Iya, who was seven, shook their heads.

"A little bitty baby rat. Didn't have no front feet." He pulled his arms into his shirt so the sleeves flapped loose. The babies smiled.

"Do you think his feet are going to grow? Maybe catch up with him while he's crawling, face in the muck?"

The babies shook their heads. The aunts and uncles, ten other girls and six boys, all younger than me by a year and more, smiled at Reez's story.

"No? Not even if he's patient?"

The babies shook their heads.

Setham stiffened at that, his wingless back straight.

"You're right," Reez said. "And his litter mates knew his feet wouldn't ever grow too. So they ate him." He sprang forward, all teeth and hard smile, bent over the babies, sleeves flapping.

The older babies squealed in terrified delight. Some started crying. The uncles and aunts laughed.

Reez said, "Stop that."

Reez looked up at me, bent so that his shirt was tight against his back and I could see his wing buds, like two angry fists between his shoulder blades. He would be a man soon, would take to the sky.

Setham could see them too. Which was Reez's point.

"Just telling a story, Dawn," Reez said. "Patience doesn't make feet."

And stones don't make brains." I regretted the words immediately. Reez's eyes hardened until they matched his killing smile. He straightened, looked at me, then looked at Setham.

"What have I missed lately?" he asked. "Did you crawl into her blanket, Setham?"

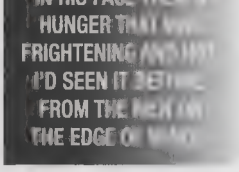
"Enough." I said, hot-faced at the insult. "You know the rules. I'd stab him if he tried." Wouldn't I? Wouldn't I stab my favorite uncle if he touched my cheek softly, traced his hands down my back?

Napping time now, babies," I said, before Reez could come up with more nonsense. The other raising girls plucked up their babies or held onto the children's hands. Jarn pulled away from me and looked up. He was ten, too old to be treated as a babe. I took his hand anyway. It wasn't easy to watch your favorite aunt or uncle fly away. He squeezed my fingers and was silent as we started back to the blocks. I crooned to him about tomorrow skies, hellos and good-byes.

Neither Reez nor Setham followed us. When I looked back, Reez was walking the other way, his shirt off, his budding wings red and sore at the base of his shoulders and curled like new thistle leaves reaching up toward his neck. Setham just stood there, like he was rooted to the ground, his face tipped to the mountain, to the sky where Bell had just been.

The babies went to sleep easily and the other boys coaxed Jarn into a game of sticks and marbles. Melda said she'd watch the babies while the other raising girls strained the greens for dinner. I went for Bell's things. She hadn't left much behind, but tradition says all left-behinds go to the big room where anybody can take what they want.

I picked up the basket of her stuff, a square of soft red cloth, a perfectly round silver disk, a piece of charcoal, four cups, and a string of metal bars so thin they rang out when the wind touched them. I wondered if Jarn had had a chance to look through her things. I took out the red cloth and put it on Jarn's blanket, then I walked through the low-ceiling maze of plastic walls to the center of our home.



I had not expected Setham to be looking at his naked body in the broken mirrors that covered the wall from ceiling to floor. He was turned so he could look at his own back. He had strong, straight limbs, a wide-shouldered torso, and a flat, muscled stomach.

He caught sight of my reflection. His look was angry, then ashamed, and he packed up his breeches from the floor and covered his groin. I could still see his butt and his long, lean, wingless back in the mirror.

"Didn't know you'd come in," I said, trying to make my voice normal.

He must have bathed recently because I could see the color of his blush. His hair brushed over his eyebrows, long enough to hood his eyes when he tipped his head down.

I felt a curious, quick heat below my stomach and knew I was blushing too. Was this the lust that drew the wings to the sky, to mate, to join, to drop their babies here in the compost and let them be raised by aunties and uncles with no wings of their own?

"Dawn, please don't tell," he said.

I nodded, unable to keep from snatching glances of his back, so odd and beautiful, with all the muscles of a man, but no wings. His thighs and calves were spread just enough, and bunched tight enough, it looked like they alone could carry him into flight.

I shrugged. "I don't have any wings."

"Yet," he said.

"Yet."

"But you still have time."

"So do you." I didn't remind him that he was older than me, older than the oldest girl who hadn't thrown herself off Mount Discard.

"Do you know how many aunts and uncles I have seen take wing?"

I shook my head.

"Thirty." He said it again, softer, as if it were a number he'd never heard before: "Thirty. And all of them were your age, Dawn. Not old, like me."

I put the basket down and stepped closer to him, to my brother-uncle, older than me all my life, strong and patient as he scoured the earth for pieces of the sky.

"You are not old, Setham. Maybe twenty-one?"

"Twenty-five."

"You will fly. You have wings here." I pressed my fingertips against his chest, over his heart. I could feel the heat from his skin and the rhythm of his blood pumping. He took a small, quick breath. His eyes closed. He placed the fingers of his left hand over mine—his other hand still holding breeches against him.

"Dawn," he whispered.

"Found a new nest of rats," a voice called out from the door.

I jerked, and Setham's head snapped up to look over my shoulder at who had just walked in.

Reez's scowl shifted to a hard, wide smile. I saw him in the mirror behind Setham, and knew he saw Setham's naked back.

I turned and stepped to block Reez's view of the mirror.

"Enough for dinner?" I asked.

"Killed them all," he said, gaze still on Setham. "Worked up a hard hunger." Reez's hands, dirty with rat blood, clenched and unclenched.

"I'll help you clean them and start the fire," I said.

"You got babies to watch?" he asked.

"Not right now, they're sleeping."

I walked over to him, caught my fingers around his hard wrist. The rat blood stank like burnt hair. I slid my hand into his hand. There was a change in his face then, a hunger that was frightening and hot. I'd seen it before, from the men on the edge of wings. It was a look only the sky cured.

"Leave us, Dawn," Setham said. "Reez and I need to talk."

I looked over at Setham, and he was the uncle I had always known, patient and strong. He was taller than Reez, and stronger, I now realized. But the smell of blood and Reez's fists made me hesitate.

There was nothing in tradition about this, nothing in the old songs that talked of men hating men, of wings and no wings. I felt outside this, alone. Scared.

"Dawn," Setham said again in a tone I had obeyed since birth, "go start the fire. We'll be out soon enough."

I walked out. But I went around to the back halls behind the big room and pressed into the little space between two walls, where the plastic and cardboard weren't strong enough to keep me out. I pressed my forehead against the wall and listened.

". . . elder," Setham said. "You are not the first to want my place, Reez."

"I don't want your place. I want you dead."

"You want Dawn. Have for years."

That startled me. Reez and I had been babes together. Sibs. I'd never thought of him as a man wanting until today.

"You don't understand," Reez growled.

"Because I don't have wings?" Setham laughed, but it was a hollow sound. "I understand, Reez. Even without wings. And I've made my choices. One of them involves you."

"I don't want any part of you, Setham."

"I'm leaving tonight."

It felt as if all the world shook out from under my feet.

"Dawn will be the eldest instead of me. You will listen to her and obey her as your elder. She will now make the rules and the decisions. You will not touch her. It is forbidden." Then his voice changed to the familiar, kind uncle.

"I know you can wait for that knowing, that touching, until you wing," Setham said. "You are strong enough. You belong to the sky. Don't tie yourself to the earth."

It was all I could stand to hear. I pushed away from the wall and walked away. I heard the babies crying and the raising girls' voices shushing. I wanted to walk and keep on walking, away from the blocks where suddenly I was the oldest, to a place, a somewhere no one could take away, leave, or change. But I had a fire to start and rats to clean.

By the time night came on, all the brothers and sisters and babies had gathered around the cooking pit while the sky above brooded red and orange.

The smell of cooked rat and stewed toxweed filled the air. I held Shida in my arms. She was two years old already and loved to run. I could usually make her hold still for meals, but she was wriggling to get free tonight, and I wasn't doing much to keep her still.

Reez turned the rats on the spit. His face was dark as night in the orange of the fire and his eyes looked at me with regret when he thought I didn't see.

I looked for Setham.

Once the meal was cooked, the babies settled down a bit, and even little Shida quieted. We fed them toxweed boiled milky blue. We scooped the soft sweet weed into the babies mouths, and they suckled the juice. The older babies helped themselves to the plate of rat and greens, happy and unaware that something had just changed, something more than another aunt flying away.

Reez knew though. And so did I.

Setham melted in from the shadows, his shirt off, and wearing only breeches and boots. The babies looked up at him and called his name. He was their favorite uncle. He brought them new brothers and sisters, and would lift each of them high in his arms and spin them, laughing, whenever they asked.

Setham smiled as three of the babies ran to him and tugged him over to the fire.

He turned enough that I could see the hard, bare muscles of his back. No wings. Showing all the others his lack and wordlessly telling them he would leave on foot instead of air. My stomach felt cold, and the smell of dinner made me ill.

"Dawn will be the elder now," Setham said. Everyone nodded.

Reez said nothing, though I caught his satisfied smirk.

I ate a little toxweed and drank warm water, but couldn't stomach my worry.

At the end of the meal, Melda and the other raising girls gathered the babies and took them off to tuck under thick blankets. The other boys touched Setham's hand or shoulder, saying their good-byes in

the way boys do, with nods and thin smiles. Jarn was the last. He threw his arms around Setham and drew him into a tight hug.

"I'll miss you," Jarn said.

"I'll remember you," Setham replied.

Jarn released him and dashed off after the other boys.

Reez stood and stretched.

"Good-bye, Setham. Enjoy the wilds." He whistled as he walked away, his stride confident, strong.

I shook my head. "I'm sorry, Setham."

"For what? I have no wings. So long as I don't throw myself off Mount Discard, I won't die of it." His smile was quick and warm.

He took the few steps to lower himself next to me, his knees folded criss-cross, facing the coals of the cook fire.

"You're leaving tonight?" I asked.

"I should. Though I worry about Reez. Has he touched you, Dawn?"

I shook my head. "I'd stab him—any of the girls would—then we'd throw him in a scorpion hole."

Setham chuckled. "You have grown. I'll miss seeing you in wings."

I reached out for his hand, and we twined fingers. His fingers were long and strong, and warmer than mine. They felt fine and right between my own. I felt accepted, blessed, belonged.

"I would go with you," I whispered.

He tilted a look at me. "Did I ever tell you how I came to the blocks?"

I shook my head.

"I wasn't brought here like the babies. No uncle or aunt found me. I walked in on my own."

"That can't be. Only babies come here."

"I remember the skyworld, Dawn. I remember my mother. She said I was five years old—too old to hide in the sky any longer. I remember the day she brought me down to the wilds and winged away."

"Why would your mother keep you that long?"

Setham shrugged again. "I think if babies are to wing, they must be very young when they come to their birth soil. The wings are in this place somewhere. Maybe in the water, the sun, the toxweed juice. Something about this place has wings in it. But not if you're brought here too late. Not for men like me."

I held his hand and leaned my head so that it rested against the round of his shoulder. We sat there as the fire burned down to darkness.

He turned and helped me up to my feet.

"You never said I couldn't go with you." I searched his eyes. Was I his favorite niece? Could I hope I was more than that?

He brushed one finger over my cheek. "Look down on me when you reach the sky, Dawn. I'll be looking up for you."

He turned and picked up his shirt and pack. Then he walked away.

A baby squalled and another took up the cry. I took a deep breath. There were babies to tend and food to find. Someone else would have to walk out into the junk and stink to find the babies before the dogs or rats did. I had a lot of decisions to make: people to care for. And I didn't have time to cry because an uncle was walking out of my world instead of flying.

I strode back to the blocks, to the bawling babies, and tried to ignore the strange itch that plucked at my shoulder blades.

When I turned eighteen, and Reez had long taken to the sky, I left the blocks behind me. I gave each of the babies a kiss, and Jarn, who was thirteen and equal to my height, held out a square of red cloth.

"It was Bell's," he said.

"I remember." The cloth was worn, the edges frayed. "Don't you want to keep it?"

He shrugged. "I'll go find her in a couple years." At my look, he grinned sheepishly. "I have her chunes too."

I smiled.

"I'll miss you," I said.

"I'll remember you," he replied. Then, with a smile, "Fly well, Dawn." I walked away to Mount Discard. My wings had come in slowly, but were strong and silky yellow. The wind felt wonderful as it stirred against them, and I stretched them out to unfurl above my head, then tucked them back again, enjoying the pure motion, the inherent promise of flight.

Mount Discard grew larger and larger as I neared it. Once I made it to its base, it took me all afternoon to clamber over the broken bits of metal, wire, and chunks of rot and filth until I finally reached the top.

I paused there, all the wilds of my world spread out before me. I clutched the red cloth tight in one fist.

I pushed out, and fell. My wings fanned wide, caught too much air, and I hissed from the jerk of pain that stitched my spine and stomach. I pulled my arms in, and remembered to angle my wings, cutting the air, catching half, just enough, that I could push against it and up. Thermals cupped me, warm like fire, like a hand, and lifted me as I shuddered and sweated, and learned my own body in the wind.

For three days I flew above the wilds, always below the ceiling of brown clouds. It would be easy to slip upward, to see, just once, what color the sky was on the other side. But I kept my gaze on the Earth, looking for something else.

The wilds here were made of stone. Empty stone streets, empty stone houses and stone rivers filled with water that was green and almost clear. Beside the river was a square of bare soil that looked as if it had been dug into rows. And at one end of that soil was a man.

I tucked my wings and landed on my feet a short distance in front of him.

Setham looked up from his work, rocks in both hands. His eyes narrowed, and then his mouth smiled and he laughed.

I smiled back.

"Dawn?"

"I saw you from above. You weren't looking up."

He tossed the rocks on a pile beyond the dirt and walked closer to me.

"What beautiful wings," he said, his voice as kind and gentle as I had remembered. "You must be the envy of every man in skyworld."

I looked away.

"You have gone to skyworld, haven't you, Dawn?" This now, disapproving.

I looked back at him, my gaze level. "No. Nor do I intend to."

Setham blinked. "You have wings."

"I love you. I always have. Don't look at me like that. I know what happens in the skyworld. I know I should rise up and find a mate and have a baby and drop it in the birthing soil. And I know the men who have gone there. Reez. Others. Hungry men. Angry men."

"Dawn." He shook his head.

"And I know you." I stepped forward and caught his hands in mine, afraid of his answer and needing him to feel me, to understand me. His hands were stronger than I remembered and he smelled of rich brown dirt that was new to me, and the familiar sweet-sour musk of his own sweat.

"Can you love me even though I have wings?"

Setham gazed at my face. "You'll want more than me someday. You'll want the sky."

"Don't tell me what I want. I know my own heart, Setham. It is not in the sky. It never has been."

"You've given this some thought."

"Years."

He drew me into his arms. He was warm and smooth-muscled, and his fingers over my shirt found the curve of the small of my back, then ventured sweetly up to where the base of my wings pushed through my shirt.

I drew my own hands up from the side of his hips to his back, and savored the long wingless curve of his spine.

"If you decide to go ..."

"I won't. But I'd take you with me," I said.

Setham pulled back just enough that he could study my face again. Finally, like a slow seep of water through the soil, he smiled. "I believe you would," he said. And the reflection of the sky and earth in his eyes was brown and warm and home. ❧

FANTASY THAT GOES TO THE NEXT MILLENNIUM AND BEYOND FROM ROC

FLIGHTS
EXTREME VISIONS OF FANTASY
RAYMOND E. FEIST ▼ ORSON SCOTT CARD
NEIL GAIMAN ▼ DENNIS L. MCKIERNAN
PATRICIA A. MCKILLIP ▼ LARRY NIVEN
JOYCE CAROL OATES ▼ HARRY TURTLEDOVE
CHARLES DE LINT ▼ GENE WOLFE
AND OTHER MASTERS OF STORYTELLING
EDITED BY AL SARRANTONIO
BRAM STOKER AWARD-WINNING EDITOR OF REDSHIFT
0-451-45917-6 $24.95

This daring, all-new anthology showcases some of the genre's biggest names and hottest newcomers. Setting the standard for the twenty-first century, this collection presents fantasy that reinvigorates the field of science fiction.

Includes new stories from:

NEIL GAIMAN
HARRY TURTLEDOVE
DENNIS L. MCKIERNAN
JOYCE CAROL OATES
ORSON SCOTT CARD
And others

Available in hardcover from Roc

A member of Penguin Group (USA)
www.penguin.com

By Eric T. Baker

Ninja Gaiden for the Xbox offers a cool hero and stunning cut scenes.

Recently, Team Ninja, the Japanese game company, has garnered attention for its work on the *DOA* (*Dead on Arrival*) series of games. *DOA* is a franchise about which people are divided in their opinion of the gameplay, but unanimous in praising the games' graphics. But before Team Ninja started *DOA*, they did a side scrolling game called *Ninja Gaiden*, which is one of the classic games of the genre both for its looks and its gameplay. This month they release a brand new version of *Ninja Gaiden* for the Xbox, updated, polished, and made 3-D.

As expected, *NG* looks gorgeous. The cut scenes are as lavish and detailed as anything being done in video games by anyone. All the bosses in the game get their own intro and exit cut scene, and there are others to advance the plot. The cut scenes alone are worth the cost of the game, but *NG* also contains hours of ninja action. The in-game graphics aren't as good as the cut scenes, but the gameplay sections have the detail of a fight game rather than an adventure game.

The plot of *NG* is about a quest for a magic sword. The hero purchases better weapons and earns more magic powers, fighting his way through hordes of minions, and facing off against amazing looking and extremely hard to beat bosses. Actually, fighting the bosses is the frustrating part of the game, killing a boss to get to the next cut scene is always a big challenge. Overall, though *Ninja Gaiden* is a stunning looking game with good gameplay and an amazingly cool hero.

The *Riddle of Steel* from Driftwood Publishing is a paper and dice roleplaying game whose combat is quick and elegant to resolve, and at the same time it models reality so well that it is endorsed by the Association for Renaissance Martial Arts. This means that unlike in many other games, being hit by a weapon is a bad thing, which means combat really is less about skills, armor, and weapons and much more about surprise, numbers, and just plain not being hit. Parallel to the combat system is a freeform magic system that makes sorcerers stunningly powerful if they are given the time to cast their spells. The game takes place in the fantasy world, Weyrth, which has 40 nations, most of which have their own modifiers to starting stats and fighting style.

What makes *RoS* different from other traditional well-modeled fantasy worlds is that each character gets six spiritual attributes as well as physical and mental ones. These are destiny, conscience, faith, drive, passion, and luck. Each spiritual attribute gets a description and a number of dice assigned to it. The player can add the dice to any check where the descriptor applies. Thus if a hero has two dice in passion (loyalty to mentor) the player could add two dice to any test that concerned an action that would benefit the character's mentor. Characters earn experience points for using spiritual dice, so not only does following the character's passions increase their effectiveness, but it also improves them faster.

Unearthed Arcana *is the latest Dungeons & Dragons supplement from Wizards of the Coast*

EOS.. TRANSCEND THE ORDINARY

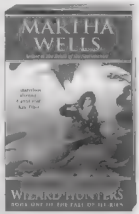
THE SHIPS OF AIR

Book Two of the Fall of Ile-Rien

MARTHA WELLS

"One of the more graceful wordsmiths currently writing fantasy."
—Fantasy & Science Fiction

ISBN 0-380-97789-3 • HARDCOVER • $24.95 ($38.95 CAN.)



THE WIZARD HUNTERS

Book One of the Fall of Ile-Rien

MARTHA WELLS

"Sword and sorcery meets dirigibles in this entertaining adventure." *—Locus*

ISBN 0-380-80798-X • PAPERBACK • $7.99 ($10.99 CAN.)

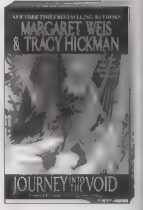
JOURNEY INTO THE VOID

Volume Three of the Sovereign Stone Trilogy

MARGARET WEIS & TRACY HICKMAN

"The best of the duo's high fantasies to date." *—Booklist*

ISBN 0-06-102059-1 • PAPERBACK • $7.99 ($10.99 CAN.)



YEAR'S BEST FANTASY 4

EDITED BY DAVID G. HARTWELL AND KATHRYN CRAMER

Established masters rub elbows with rising stars in this treasure trove of stories.

ISBN 0-06-052182-1 • PAPERBACK • $7.99 ($10.99 CAN.)

eos

To subscribe to the online monthly Eos newsletter, "OUT OF THIS WORLD" go to www.eosbooks.com

YOUR #1 SOURCE FOR
UNIQUE GIFTWARE

We offer DRAGONS, Fairies, Unicorns, Wizards, Gargoyles, Skulls, Mermaids, Lamps, Candleholders, Jewelry Boxes, Goblets, Ashtrays, Bookends, 3D Laser Engraved Crystals, Waterballs, Jewelry Organizers and much, much more

WWW.FANTASY-GIFT.COM

Discover the world of Dancing Dragons where dragons roam free!

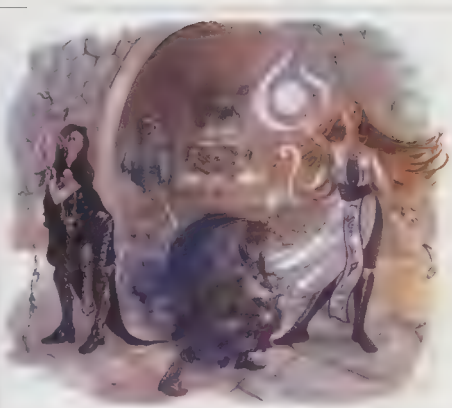
www.legendsoffantasy.com
Join the "Dragons Court" online, a unique club for dracophiles.
www.dancingdragon.com

Noric's Dagger
Fantasy Daggers And More
At Down To Earth Prices

www.noricsdagger.com

ROBERT A. MADLE
BOOKSELLER
Science Fiction • Fantasy • Magazines & Books
From 1900 to Present • Many Rare & Unusual Items
Collections Purchased (Large & Small)
96 Page Catalog Send $5.00 to
Department ROF 4406 Bestor Drive
Rockville, Maryland 20853 • 301-460-4712

SUBSCRIBE TO
REALMS OF FANTASY
ONLY $16.95 FOR ONE YEAR!
CALL TODAY! 800-219-1187



Taken all together *RoS* is a fascinating game For realism in execution and results the combat system is fantastic It models not only actual wounding, but also how hard it is to get a fair fight started in the real world Both attack and defense are modified by maneuvers taken from period European dueling manuals. The game even lets characters "choke up" on their swords so that they can use them without penalty at a shorter range than normal At the same time, there is no attempt to balance fighters and magic users Given time, Sorcerers can accomplish campaign-changing feats, at the cost of losing months off their lives. Players have to consider if the power is worth the price. And then there is the spiritual attributes, which give both the player and the GM a solid set of goals for what sorts of stories they want to play It then rewards the players for actually seeking and acting out those stories

Champions of Norrath from Sony Entertainment and for the PS2 is a much more traditional sword and sorcery game Set in the world of Sony's *Everquest On-line* *CoN* is a stand alone game for one to four players, either online, over a network, or with a multitap. Players pick from five different races and five different character classes customize their characters' looks and then set out to complete the game s adventure using a combination of magic and steel to battle through 45 levels

There is nothing in *CoN* that is new or groundbreaking, but the multiplayer mode for up to four players is a very welcome option that is seldom seen in PS2 games The game contains 10,000 items, many of which the characters craft themselves using pieces and parts found while adventuring. There is a multitude of spells available .ncluding Pet spells and some nasty area effect ones A nice feature is that players can save their characters and use them with other people's copies of the game, which is very useful for Internet play For players who finish the levels that come in the game, there is a random dungeon generator to keep the play going *CoN* is a hack and slash experience rather than a storytelling one, but for what it is, it is a very enjoyable game

A second ninja game this month is *Nightshade* by and from Sega for the PS2 *Nightshade* is set in the same universe as Sega's brilliant, but overly challenging *Shinobi* game that came out last year Despite its setting, *Nightshade* is not a rehash of *Shinobi* The character models and graphics engine are retained, but the controls and the gameplay have been reworked. All enemies the heroine battles are new It is a familiar setting, but

Nightshade is a new game

The action of *Nightshade* takes place in what is basically modern-day Japan, except that magic works and civilization is protected by super-powered ninjas. The heroine is Hibana, and she is one of those protective ninjas. She's also involved in the eternal struggle for control of a dangerous magical sword. She gains a number of cool powers as the game goes along, all of which she'll end up needing

Nightshade keeps the coolest thing from the *Shinobi* game When Hibana kills four or more enemies in rapid succession, the game freezes and a quick cut scene shows the enemies deaths while Hibana strikes a cool pose. Another feature from *Shinobi* that has been retained is that the many attacks combine with the many acrobatic maneuvers to give Hibana an amazing number of ways to travel across the screen and kill her opponents. What has changed, however, is the way that these combinations are launched from the controller They are much easier to do than they were in *Shinobi*, which is not to say that they are easy *Nightshade* is easier to control than *Shinobi*, but it is still a hard game with a very steep learning curve. The payoff is very exciting, but getting there can be frustrating

Blood and Salt is a new supplement for White Wolf's *Exalted* line. This 126-page

New Realms of Adventure for Your Checks

...into the realm of fantasy—a land of breathtaking images and equally dramatic savings.

FREE Shipping and Handling!

ESCAPE FROM REALITY

Whelan Dragons #ZC173

Matching Labels #ZD173

Card #ZC173

Leather Checkbook Cover #CV173

Styles

©Michael Whelan

TO ORDER ADDRESS LABELS OR CONTACT CARDS:
Clearly print your imprint information on a separate sheet of paper.

LABELS: Max. 3 lines. 28 characters/spaces per line.

CARDS: Max. 6 lines. 28 characters/spaces per line.

SPECIAL TYPESTYLES: If none is chosen, BLOCK LETTERING will be used.

C. Old English D. Script E. Elegant F. Architect

The Styles Check Company
P.O. Box 2 • Bel Air, MD 21014-0002
www.styleschecks.com
1-800-356-0353 • No holds applied
Phone Hours: Mon-Fri, 8:00AM to 11:00PM (ET)
Sat/Sun, 8:30AM to 7:00PM (ET)
To receive first-time customer pricing, use offer code ZS1546.
Your order will be mailed to the address on your voided check unless otherwise specified. Please allow 2-3 weeks for regular delivery.

EZShield Check Fraud Protection Program™ (Pat. Pend.): Guard your checks from unauthorized use of up to $25,000 for only $1.00 per box. Underwritten by Lloyd's of London. See order form. To learn more, visit www.ezshield.org.

Introductory Prices For New Customers Only

	Single Checks	Duplicate Checks
1 Box	$12.95	1 Box $14.95
2 Boxes (200 checks)	$21.50	(150 checks) 2 Boxes $25.90 (300 checks)

Save $4 on 2nd Box!

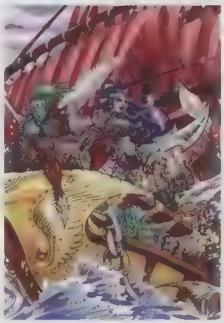
Ready to reorder? Call 1-800-724-3257

Offer Code: ZS1546

Sales Tax only for delivery to AR (6.625%) and MD (5%)

book contains only three chapters, but those chapters contain two mini-campaign settings. The first chapter is about the province of An-Teng. The book presents it as a microcosm of what is happening all across the *Exalted* world as the Empire slowly loses its grip and the menaces from without and within press harder on the remnants of power. An-Teng is unique in that none of the god-like Exalted have risen to try and take their place as the province's rulers, but in their growing dissatisfaction with the rule of demigod-like Dragon Blooded, An Teng is just like many places in the Empire.

The second chapter is devoted to the Lintha Family, which is not a single clan, but rather a small nation, and race, of pirates never conquered by the Empire, and whose warships are pulled through the water by demons. They are also Yoni-worshippers, castrati, cannibals and worse." Cannibalism is part of the Lintha's religion, they eat only those worthy of the compliment–mostly each other—but sometimes particularly well-regarded enemies. The Lintha practice both male and female castration among themselves in an effort to inhibit cross breeding with other races, they practice castration on their subjects and slaves mostly for the fun of it.



The third chapter is a sort of dramatis personae of the most important meta-beings in An-Teng and in the Lintha Family, as well as some major beasts and monsters and gods (although in the *Exalted* setting the line between these three things is not often clear) associated with the two places. An example of these blurred lines is Mnalilli Nganto, the half-woman, half-bar-

racuda ruler of the Pelagothrope who is an ally of the Lintha and commands her own small pirate fleet. Overall, *Blood and Salt* is a useful addition to an *Exalted* library, particularly for parties that like sea adventures.

The latest *Dungeons & Dragons* supplement from Wizards of the Coast is *Unearthed Arcana*, a collection of variant rules to mix and match with any existing *D&D* campaign. The book is 224 slick, full-color pages with six chapters covering topics from races to campaigns. The chapter on Adventuring, for instance, has optional rules for armor, hit points, letting the players roll all the dice, and more. The chapter on magic has optional rules for metamagic components, item familiars, alternate summon creature lists, and so on. The writers don't intend that any one campaign use all these rules, or that any player or GM even read them all. What they do intend is that each group find something in these rules to shape its campaign more how they want it to play.

Everyone will find something different to interest them in this book. Some eye-catching examples are variant character classes like the bardic sage (less thievery, more knowledge), the druidic avenger (less spell use, more ass kicking), the slaughter paladin (fighting for the cause of chaotic evil), and variant monk fighting styles. There are rules and tables for giving characters a more detailed background in case adventuring is their second career. The rules for letting players do all the dice rolling are very attractive as they keep the players interested and involved even when it isn't their turn, at the cost of limiting the DM's ability to fudge rolls to the players' advantage (or disadvantage). Not all the ideas are great, but there are so many good ones that the few clunkers don't matter.

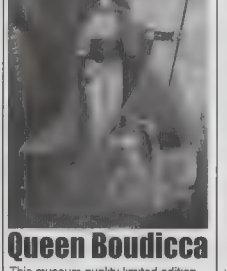
Generation 2
Swords Designed for Steel-to-Steel™
IP-037-2
Chaos Sword
Under special contract with the foundry, we have developed specifications that can only be called Generation2. The manufacturer is now producing the new swords (unlike any they have ever made) with all new specifications, and a new tempering process that will truly make the Generation2 swords ready to win the Steel-to-SteelSM challenge.
IP-035-2
www.imperialweapons.com
IP-090-2 Twin Elven Daggers
Limited Numbered Edition
Only 100 numbered pieces worldwide.
Each scabbard included.
For contact information:
Imperial Weapons
88 Foxworth Dr.
Jackson, TN 38305
731-664-5774
imperial@imperialweapons.com
Contracted as the exclusive distributor for Gen.2

Music from a Distant Age . . .
What If the King Should Come To The City
a new CD of Renaissance Keyboard Music unlike any other
wrought in the Spirit of Both Then and Now
Send $14.95 plus $2.50 shipping and handling
(MA add 8.25% sales tax) to: Penguin on the Telly Ltd.
JAF Station, PO Box 935, New York, NY 10116
Visit our website: www.penguin-ltd.com
Tel/fax 212/928-8510

CARPATINA
MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE
CLOAKS & CAPES
Medieval and Renaissance style cloaks, capes, tunics and gowns created in the finest wools and velvets. We also offer a line of hand crafted peasant blouses imported from Transylvania.
Custom orders welcomed.
Visit us at www.carpatina.com or call 603-881-3443 for a catalogue.

Many Many Readers of Fantasy
Back Issues Looking Brand New
Orig[illegible] collection
and group[illegible] at the same time[illegible] hand-
some storage boxes[illegible] covered in a rich blue
leatherette material. A custom decorative label
with the Realms[illegible] included for
per[illegible] perfect for the home or office.

One - $15 Three - $40 Six - $80
Enclose name, address and payment with your
o[illegible] (New York Issues Please) Add[illegible]
ase for postage and ha[illegible]
Credit Card Orders: Am[illegible]
Send: Name, number and[illegible]
Orders Only. PA Residents add[illegible]
To Order Online:
[illegible]ncenterprises.net/rf.htm
Great for Gifts! Satisfaction Guaranteed
Send to: TNC Enterprises Dept. RF
P.O. Box 2475, Warminster, PA 18974

MATT HUGHES

Queen Boudicca
This museum quality limited edition
of 2,000 measures 16 by 20 inches
and retails for $50. For details email
lindsay@archer.name or visit:
PRINTS AND THE PAUPER
www.printsandthepauper.com

words & music

Continued from page 61

"Bad actions have bad consequences. What do you think *you'll* be in your next reincarnation?"

"Boy, you're a real font of wisdom these days," said Sophe.

"I'm getting old, I guess." Jake went to lunch

Sophe tidied shelves, starting with Literature. She had reached Religion when she looked up to find herself face to face with the girl's pal. *Long my imprisoned spirit lay . . .* Charles Wesley maybe knew more than she gave him credit for. The spirit behind those eyes was imprisoned and should stay so.

"I'm looking for a book," it repeated "*Necronomicon.* You've heard of it?"

Sophe laughed, perhaps because a scream would have been no defense at all. "You'll find the paperback on Amazon," she said "We don't carry that sort of thing."

"Oh yes you do."

The book at the end of the shelf, a good foot from anything else, looked nothing at all like the one pictured on Amazon. It was bound in dull metal—lead, Sophe suspected. Sophe could not bring herself to touch it, but she didn't have to. The person picked it up and walked out.

Sophe turned and saw Jake watching her.

"It didn't pay," she whispered.

"It will," he answered, as the door burst open and the girl in black flew to the counter.

"You said I should check back," the girl panted. "You *said* . . ."

Sophe reached without looking into Judaica and held out a small book covered with yellowish kidskin, unembellished, and quite old enough to have been transcribed by the Karas of Prague.

"Not that way," Sophe said, but the girl opened it left to right anyway.

Characters faded right to left across the pages of uneven parchment, going black again where the Karas had replenished his ink.

"This is in Hebrew!" the girl said.

"So what did you expect?" Sophe snapped.

"But I can't *read* Hebrew!"

"I'll teach you," said Jake.

"But that'll take *forever*!"

"Oh no." He steered the girl toward the front door. "Only about as long as it takes to teach a Methodist the second-hand book trade."

"But you wouldn't teach *me* to read Hebrew!" Sophe cried after them.

"It's not your book. It *is* your store. The papers are in the safe, along with the keys to the third floor apartment."

And they were gone.

Sophe locked the door, put up the closed sign, and went upstairs to the second-floor bachelor apartment.

It felt like an empty cocoon.

She went back downstairs to the safe, found the keys, and ascended to the third floor. She hesitated a moment on the landing at the top of the stairs before unlocking the door. What would she find? The silk and velvet draperies of a Rembrandt Old Testament painting? Incense and menorahs? A cave on a mountaintop?

Dust motes gave dancing substance to the sunlight that poured in through uncurtained windows.

Dust and wax. The scent of cut grass through a side door left open to ease the summer heat, carrying with it the sound of bees and distant traffic. A hymnal rack facing her from the back of a white-painted pew, and the minister clearing his throat to announce the page of the hymn.

Nonsense. A living room furnished secondhand, a mix of Victorian and 1950s, with an upright piano against the far wall.

Jake had a piano?

Perhaps not. Certainly he wouldn't have had the Methodist Hymnal. The old one, not the politically correct new one.

I'd hate throwing out . . . she thought.

She sat down on the piano bench, facing out into the room.

I mean, it's a brand new bottle. I've just opened it.

She swung herself around on the bench.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay.

She remembered the eyes of the shadow person who had followed the girl.

She opened the hymn book.

She tried a chord.

A nearly full bottle, dammit.

Another chord, and then she segued into the music of Campbell's "Sagina," Charles Wesley's words.

"My chains fell off, my heart was free.
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

It's only Glenlivet, she thought. She wished she had her Grandmother's limp Moroccan-bound hymnal with the gold-edged pages and the wealth of faith soaked into it.

Everything in it's own time.

Hey!" said Sophe. "Put those books back!"

She grabbed at the hem of the young man's jacket and one of the books stuck in the waistband of his pants fell to the floor. He jerked out the second book, slammed it down, turned, and ran.

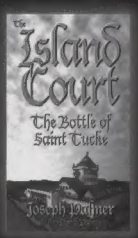
"Hey! You need a job!" Sophe called after him.

He stopped.

"Lady," he said without turning, "You think I took those books to fucking *read*?"

Dear God she breathed in sincere prayer, *is this how Jake felt when he first saw* me? ❧

wizard mountain media



The Island Court:
The Bottle of Saint Tucke
ISBN:1-410-74561-9

The Island Court:
The Pick of Vo

Dirty McNasty:
The Russian Rebuilding

Coming in 2004!

Dirty Mc Nasty
ISBN:1-410-72458-7

Coming in 2005!

The Island Court:
The Wield of Vaperwyron

DRAGON STONES

ISBN:1-410-74543-0

wizard mountain media

Wizard Mountain Media
P.O. Box 2561
Framingham, MA 01703
508-875-6796

All mass market paperbacks $8.95
$1.00 Direct Shipping and Handling

Distributed by Ingram and Baker & Taylor

Visit our Web site!

www.rofmagazine.com

You can . . .

Sign up for a new subscription

Renew a current subscription

Change your mailing address

Access Writers' Guidelines for submitting stories

This site is for you—our readers. We hope you will enjoy it and visit it often to find out what's new in fantasy!

smell of magic

Continued from page 49

I could see the terror on the boy's face as he sprinted toward the bridge and possible safety.

"Stop him!" Menan called to the villagers, but a group of them had already run to the bridge to intercept him. They cut him off with ease, and after a short struggle, the boy was brought back to the center of the green.

"So," Menan said slowly. He stroked his long nose and looked down at the boy who stood with his head bowed between the two men that held him. "What do we have here, an attack of nerves, perhaps? Or something much more dangerous?"

Menan turned to where I stood at his side. "Apprentice Kelde?" he asked. I nodded and stepped forward. I carefully took out the handkerchief from my tunic pocket and blew my nose on it. Then I replaced the handkerchief and inhaled.

I could smell the sweat of the boy and the men holding him, a slight hint of perfume from the women who stood and watched. I filtered out those smells, inhaling deeper and closed my eyes, feeling the air circulate through my nostrils.

There: I started to scent an underlying smell; it was weak and mostly masked by the sweat, but there was a definite odor of something.

I sniffed again, but couldn't get a clearer picture. The scent, almost a bittersweet smell, lingered just beyond my grasp and memory.

"Well?" Menan asked, breaking into my concentration. I opened my eyes and looked up at him, the tall hat shading the sun.

"There is something, sir. But I can't place it."

Menan nodded and motioned me aside. I stepped back and watched as Menan took my place. Menan removed his handkerchief with a flourish, passed it under his nose and then replaced it.

I always admired the flamboyance that Menan brought to his role; but then he made an imposing figure in his hat and cloak, with a thin, angular face that emphasized the long nose of his craft.

Menan inhaled with an audible intake of air and stood for a moment, as if lost in thought, before releasing the air. He looked down at the boy and smiled.

"Shape Changer," he said and then turned on his heel to walk back to the rest of the children on the green.

The villagers stood as if stunned for a moment and a woman screamed from the crowd, pushing through the onlookers.

"Not my boy!" she cried. But she was wrong, it was her boy and as he struggled to break free from his captors, his hands changed to claws. The men holding his arms released their grip for a moment as the boy's arms changed and lengthened.

Menan turned back to face the boy. He frowned and then raised the crossbow from his belt. A single bolt struck the boy in the chest. The boy looked up at Menan in surprise, the claws fading from his hands.

The boy's mother cried loudly as the other women of the village crowded around to comfort her. Inside, I knew that each of the women was secretly glad that it was not her son that had been Revealed, that her family was safe from the taint of magic.

The boy's body was taken away and I returned to the line of children. Each child shook as I approached him or her and some cried with relief as I declared them clean.

Then I reached Shara. She stood in the dress she had worn the night before, but her hair was bound up in the fashion of a maiden, now that she was no longer a child.

Her scent was no longer masked by a perfume, and I stood in front of her and removed my handkerchief from its pocket and drew it across my nose. She smiled slightly as I did so, her eyes sparkling, and I had to hide a smile in return.

I inhaled, drawing her smell into my nostrils and almost gagged with the strength of the bitter taste that it left on my tongue. That scent was not Shara's, but mingled with hers and was so familiar. Shara saw my reaction, but she kept her face clear of emotion, keeping my eyes locked with hers.

I stood and inhaled again, savoring the power of her scent, the raw emotions that it raised within me. Memories of my father came back. I remembered how the creature had burned him and the tree as he stood watching. And how he had screamed as he died.

"Fire Starter," I said and raised the crossbow from my belt. There was a gasp from the crowd and I heard the protests from Shara's family.

"Kelde, no!" Alarn called from the crowd. He pushed his way to the front, but was held back by his friends.

Shara stepped back, her hands up, as though attempting to push me away. "It's not true," she said, looking around her, tears running down her face. "It's not true."

"Apprentice Kelde," Menan said, in a low voice. I turned to see that he had raised his crossbow as well.

I looked back at Shara. I had named her, but could I do it, could I carry out the sentence? My hand shook and then I let it drop to my side.

There was the twang of a string and Shara dropped to the ground, Menan's bolt in her chest. I knelt at her side, unable to speak.

"Why, Kelde, why? You said you loved me," she asked in a whisper.

"You said you would wait. I thought of nothing else for two years but returning to you." I looked up at Alarn who stood in the crowd weeping. "But, you didn't wait, did you? You and my best friend." I wrinkled my nose at Alarn's scent that still clung to Shara's skin.

"You do still love me, don't you?" she asked in a whisper.

"I do," I replied. And despite everything, I did.

She smiled and then lay still. ❧

MITCHELL GRAHAM'S

Fifth Ring Trilogy

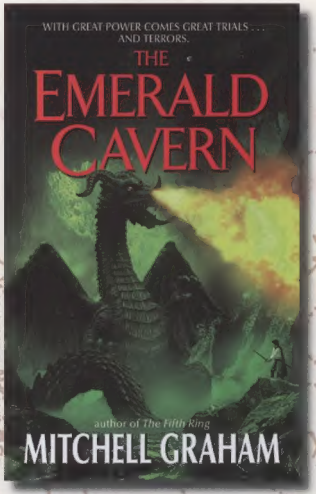
0060506512 • $7.50/$10.00 Can.

The Fifth Ring

Book One of the astounding bestseller

"I loved this book"

Scifi Dimensions



006050675X • $7.99/$13.00 Can.

The Emerald Cavern

Seeking refuge in a foreign land Mathew Lewin battles an unseen enemy and a creature that can't exist

"One of the best—most unique sagas–to come along in years"

Explorations

www.eosbooks.com
An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers
www.mitchellgraham.net

2-DISC DVD SET
WITH HOURS OF
SPECIAL FEATURES

ALSO AVAILABLE
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
AND *THE TWO TOWERS*

ON DVD MAY 25

WINNER OF 11 ACADEMY AWARDS® INCLUDING BEST PICTURE

*2003, Best Picture, Best Director, Best Art Direction, Best Visual Effects, Best Writing (Adapted Screenplay), Best Film Editing, Best Costume Design, Best Makeup, Best Sound Mixing, Best Score, Best Song

NEW LINE HOME ENTERTAINMENT

© MMIII New Line Productions, Inc. © MMIV New Line Home Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Academy Awards® is the registered trademark and service mark of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. All Rights Reserved.

PG-13

Supplemental material not rated.